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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Court denies anticipatory bail to Prajwal in rape case

Prajwal is rumoured to return from Munich on 31 May midnight

BENGALURU, 29 MAY

A Special Court here on Wednesday rejected the anticipatory bail plea of suspended JD(S) leader Prajwal Revanna, who is facing allegations of sexually abusing several women, in a rape case.

The special court for Elected Representative dismissed the bail application moved by his advocate Arun.

According to official sources, Prajwal has booked a return flight ticket to Bengaluru from Munich on 30 May, and is expected to land in the city in the small hours of 31 May.

Prajwal, grandson of JD(S) supremo HD Deve Gowda, is accused in an alleged rape and sexual harassment case involving a 47-year-old woman.

He reportedly left for Germany on 27 April, a day after Hassan Lok Sabha segment went to polls, and is still at large.

Prajwal Revanna **PHOTO: PTI**

- Asked Prajwal, grandson of JD(S) supremo HD Deve Gowda, is accused in an alleged rape and sexual harassment case involving a 47-year-old woman.

On 18 May, Special Court for Elected Representatives had issued an arrest warrant against Prajwal Revanna, following an application moved by the SIT.

However, later the SIT arrested his father and JD(S) MLA H D Revanna, who is allegedly involved in kidnapping the woman.

All eyes are on Kempegowda International Airport where Prajwal is expected to arrive on May 31, and the SIT is likely to arrest him the moment he lands.

Meanwhile, Prajwal's mother Bhavani Revanna has filed an anticipatory bail in the special court for elected representatives fearing arrest in the kidnap case linked to her husband.

SIT filed objections to granting the anticipatory bail to her and also sought to cancel the interim anticipatory bail issued to H D Revanna in the same case.

Bhavani Revanna's anticipatory bail order is reserved for 31 May.

So far two cases of sexual assault have been registered against Prajwal.

Two days ago, the Hassan MP released a video message in which he promised to appear before the SIT on May 31 and cooperate with the inquiry.

The MP has twice cancelled the flight ticket from Germany in the past, the sources added.

Meanwhile, the SIT conducted searches at Prajwal's residence in the district headquarter town of Hassan on Tuesday which went on till late in the night.

"Some incriminating materials have been seized," they said. *—PTI*

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IN JAIL FOR DELHI RIOTS

Sharjeel Imam gets bail in sedition case

NEW DELHI, 29 MAY

More than four years after he was arrested, Delhi High Court on Wednesday granted bail to student activist Sharjeel Imam in connection with a 2020 communal riots case involving allegations of sedition and unlawful activities.

Imam had assailed a trial court order refusing to release him even though he had undergone more than half of the maximum sentence that could be awarded to him, if convicted. He claimed he was entitled to bail under the criminal statute.

"Appeal is allowed," a bench of Justices Suresh Kumar Kait and Manoj Jain said after hearing the counsel for Imam and the Delhi Police.

He will, however, stay behind bars as he has not been granted relief in the case involving alleged larger conspiracy behind the 2020 North East Delhi riots which left more than 50 people dead and hundreds of others injured.

According to the prosecution, Imam made speeches at Jamia Millia Islamia on December 13, 2019 and at the Aligarh Muslim University on 16 December, 2019 where he threatened to cut off Assam and the rest of the North East from the country.

Sharjeel Imam **PHOTO: PTI**

Delhi Police counsel opposed the appeal and said Imam's case was not covered by the law on grant of bail to undertrials who have served more than half of the maximum sentence.

He claimed the delay in conclusion of the trial was attributable to Imam himself.

The activist's lawyer contended material witnesses were yet to be examined in the case and the trial in the FIR cannot be concluded in view of the Supreme Court direction keeping in abeyance the operation of section 124A (sedition).

Imam is an accused in several cases arising from the communal riots of 2020, including the case involving alleged larger conspiracy behind the violence. He is in judicial custody in the conspiracy case as well. *—PTI*

Man kills 8 family members, later kills self; probe on

CHHINDWARA, 29 MAY

A man killed eight members of his family and later committed suicide in Madhya Pradesh's Chhindwara district, an official said on Wednesday. The incident occurred in Bodal Kachhar village under the jurisdiction of Mahuljhir police station in the district in the early hours of Wednesday. Anil Singh Kushwaha, Inspector General of Police (IG) Jabalpur Zone said, "The accused was suffering from Schizophrenia. After consultation with doctors we came to know that a person suffering from the disease may attack people." State Chief Minister Mohan Yadav also expressed grief over the incident and said that an investigation would be done into the matter. *—ANI*

Woman bleeds to death after foeticide, 7 booked

BAGALKOT, 29 MAY

An FIR has been registered against seven people for forcibly aborting the foetus of 33-year-old woman leading to her death in Mahalingapur, Bagalkot. The victim Sonali Kadam succumbed to complications from a miscarriage. FIR names Sanjay Gowli, Sangita Sanjaya Gowli, Vijaya Sanjaya Gowli, Dr Maruti Babaso Khirat, Dr Kotwale, Dr Kavita Channappa and a doctor from Jaisingpur in Miraj taluk. Sonali, underwent a scan at a private hospital in Miraj, which revealed that she was carrying a female foetus. The abortion resulted in heavy bleeding, and she lost consciousness. She died in the car while being transported. *—Salar News*

SC refuses Kejri's plea for extension of interim bail

NEW DELHI, 29 MAY

Supreme Court registry on Wednesday refused urgent listing of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's plea seeking extension of his interim bail by seven days for undergoing certain medical tests. The apex court registry refused to accept the application, saying since Kejriwal was given liberty to move the trial court for regular bail, the plea is not maintainable. He has sought extension of his interim bail by seven days to undergo a host of medical tests, including a PET-CT scan, in view of his "sudden and unexplained weight loss coupled with high ketone levels", which are indicative of kidney, serious cardiac ailments and even cancer. *—PTI*

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CAA citizenship given in U'khand, Haryana, WB

NEW DELHI, 29 MAY

The Union government Wednesday started granting citizenship under the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in West Bengal, Haryana and Uttarakhand, the Home Ministry said. The applicants in the three states were granted citizenship on Wednesday by the respective State Empowered Committee, the ministry said in a statement. The first set of citizenship certificates after the notification of the Citizenship (Amendment) Rules, 2024, granted by the Empowered Committee, Delhi, were handed over to the applicants in New Delhi by the Union Home Secretary on 15 May.

aThe CAA was enacted in December 2019 for granting Indian nationality to persecuted Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, Parsi and Christian migrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan who came to India on or before 31 December, 2014. After the enactment, the CAA got the president's assent but the rules under which the Indian citizenship was granted were issued on March 11 after over a delay of four years. *—PTI*

Brij's son's convoy knocks 2 dead in UP

GONDA, 29 MAY

Two youths were killed and a woman injured after being hit by a vehicle that was allegedly in the cavalcade of BJP candidate from Kaiserganj Karan Bhushan Singh on Wednesday, police said.

Karan Singh is the son of Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, who is the Kaiserganj MP and the former Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief. The accused driver has been taken into custody and the injured were admitted to hospital, police said, adding that police personnel have been deployed in the area to ensure law and order.

Kernalganj SHO Nirbhay Narayan Singh said Rehan Khan,17 and Shehzad Khan,20, who were riding on a motorcycle were hit by the vehicle near a school. Both died on the spot. The SUV that hit the duo lost control and also hit Sita Devi, 60, who was walking on the roadside, the SHO said, adding that the woman has been admitted to a hospital.

Additional Superintendent of Police Radhey Shyam Rai said accused driver Lavkush Srivastav, 30 has been taken into custody. *—PTI*

Police personnel near the wreckage of an escort vehicle of BJP leader Karan Bhushan Singh (inset), that allegedly hit a biker **PHOTO: PTI**

DELHI RECORDS MAX TEMP AT 52.3 DEGREE CELSIUS

NEW DELHI, 29 MAY

Delhi's Mungeshpur area Wednesday logged a maximum of 52.3 degrees Celsius, the highest ever temperature recorded in the city, officials said.

Meanwhile, parts of Delhi-NCR witnessed a sudden change of weather on Wednesday evening bringing some respite to people. There were light rain showers in some parts of the national capital.

On Tuesday, the weather station in the northwest Delhi locality recorded 49.9 degrees Celsius. An IMD official told PTI, this is the highest ever maximum temperature recorded so far in Delhi. IMD regional head Kuldeep Srivastava said the city's outskirts are the first areas to be hit by hot winds from Rajasthan. "Parts of Delhi are particularly susceptible to the early arrival of these hot winds, worsening the already severe weather. Areas like Mungeshpur, Narela and Najafgarh are the first to experience the full force of these hot winds," he said. *—PTI*

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BACK TO SCHOOL

After two-month-long summer vacation, students return to schools in Bengaluru on Wednesday. Many parents have complained against the schools hiking the overall fees by 60% and demanding fee payment in one installment. Earlier, the amount was supposed to be paid in three to four installments. **PHOTO: SALAR**

India successfully test-fires Rudra air-to-surface missile

NEW DELHI, 29 MAY

India on Wednesday successfully test-fired a Rudra air-to-surface missile from a Su-30 fighter jet of the Indian Air Force off the coast of Odisha.

RudraM-II is an indigenously-developed solid-propelled air-launched missile system meant for air-to-surface role to neutralise several types of enemy assets.

A number of state-of-the-art indigenous technologies developed by various DRDO (Defence Research and Development Organisation) laboratories have been incorporated in the missile system. It was developed under Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative. Defence Ministry said the performance of the missile has been validated from the flight data captured by range tracking instruments such as electro-optical systems, radar and telemetry stations deployed at various locations. *—PTI*

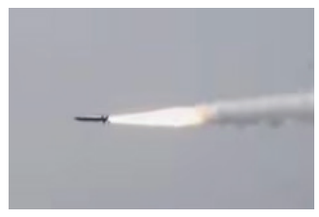

PHOTO: PTI

HP: 1,038 FOREST FIRES REPORTED, 38 FIRs FILED

SHIMLA, 29 MAY

Twenty-five forest fires were reported in Himachal Pradesh on Wednesday, taking the number of such blazes during this summer season to 1,038 so far, officials said.

Property worth about Rs 3 crore has been damaged, they said.

However, no casualty was reported, said Assistant Chief Conservator of Forests Pushpinder Rana.

"We have over 3,000 local field officers and holidays of staff have been cancelled," he said, adding that 18,000 volunteers of the state disaster management authority are rendering help and 'aapada mitra' (volunteers for disaster response) have also come forward to help the forest department in dousing the fire.

"So far 38 FIRs have been registered and 600 complaints have been given to the police for investigation and action against offenders, and we have also asked the general public to share photos and videos if they see someone lighting fire in the forests," he added.

Human activities like throwing a burning cigarette in the forest and lighting up a fire for various purposes also lead to a large number of fires, Himachal Pradesh's Principal Chief Conservator of Forests Rajiv Kumarsaid, adding that efforts are being taken to control such incidents.

Out of the 25 incidents reported Wednesday, one fire incident was reported in Dharampur in Solan district in which the fire spread to a building, causing an estimated loss in lakhs. *—PTI*

Summer danger: Chemically ripened watermelons pose health risks

VAISHNAVI GOPALRAJ
BENGALURU, 29 MAY

Summer days call for cool, refreshing treats, and watermelons often top the list. But this year, a shadow hangs over this summertime favourite. An investigation by Salar News revealed the widespread use of chemicals to grow and ripen watermelons, posing significant health risks to consumers.

As the reporter visited a fruit godown to inspect the watermelons, she inhaled thick chemical fumes, immediately resulting in sneezing, coughing and difficulty breathing. The stench of the chemicals was so strong that workers were forced to wear face masks. Alarmingly, the investigation found that eight out of 10 fruit stalls contained a mix of chemically treated and organically grown watermelons, with both vendors and consumers often unaware of its presence. Growers inject the fruit with dyes to give it a dark red colour.

If a tissue rubbed on watermelon turns red, it indicates artificial colouring

SALAR EXCLUSIVE

Chemical cocktail

The chemicals used to grow watermelons are Forchlorfenuron, Erythrosine and Calcium Carbide. Forchlorfenuron, a growth regulator, helps the fruit grow in one-and-a-half-months instead of naturally growing in three months. Erythrosine is a pink dye used to enhance colour and Calcium Carbide, a fast-acting ripening agent that is applied on top of the fruit. Experts warn that Forchlorfenuron and Calcium Carbide together can cause serious health problems, including cancer, thyroid issues, and liver and kidney damage. *—Salar News*

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The chemicals used to grow watermelons are Forchlorfenuron, Erythrosine and Calcium Carbide

Students in Bidar college clash over religious song

BIDAR, 29 MAY

A clash broke out between two groups of students at an engineering college here over playing a song from actor Prabhas-starrer 'Adipurush' at a cultural event on Wednesday, police sources said. Soon after the 'Jai Sri Ram' song was played, a section of students took objection to it and clashed with another group in Guru Nanak Dev Engineering College in Bidar. According to sources, one student was injured in the scuffle inside the college auditorium. Upon learning about the incident, police rushed to the spot. Later, Ministers Eshwar Khandre and Rahim Khan also visited the college to diffuse the situation. *—Salar News*

Man killed in gang retaliation in Kanakapura

RAMANAGARA, 29 MAY

In an incident that has unfolded in Kurupete, Kanakapura town in Ramanagara district, where a 45-year-old was brutally murdered by a gang seeking revenge against his son. The conflict traces back to a birthday celebration in April when Arun and the victim Gundayya's eldest son, Rudresh, had a quarrel. This altercation escalated to violence, leading to Rudresh assaulting and stabbing Arun, resulting in Rudresh's imprisonment. Rudresh was released on bail last Saturday, which reignited the tension between the Arun and him again. Seeking revenge, Arun and his gang plan to attack Rudresh. However, on Monday night, when they arrived at Rudresh's home to carry out their plan, they found him absent. In a tragic turn of events, they vented their fury on Rudresh's father, Gundayya. Arun, along with his accomplices, attacked Gundaya with a rod, delivering a fatal blow to his head. Gundayya succumbed to his injuries on the spot. The attackers fled the scene immediately after the assault. Ramanagara SP Karthik Reddy confirmed the details of the incident, highlighting the brutality of the attack and its impact on the local community. In response to the murder, the Kanakapura police have arrested the accused Arun, and two other individuals. Reddy said that the police have implemented strict measures to prevent any further escalation of gang violence. *—Salar News*

Mysuru's heritage buildings all set for transformation

MYSURU, 29 MAY

Mysuru's rich architectural heritage buildings are all set for a transformation. The Department of Archaeology, Museums, and Heritage, along with the Heritage Committee, have completed a comprehensive survey of 129 heritage buildings in the City. Following the survey, 11 heritage structures have been identified for immediate restoration, while plans are underway for the reconstruction of four iconic buildings in the old model. The State government has taken the bold decision to demolish several dilapidated structures, including the Lansdowne Building, Devaraja Market, Maharani College, and Hostel Building. Among the heritage buildings slated for immediate restoration are the iconic Vani Vilasa Market, Attara Office, Fire Brigade Building, Maharani Science College, Government Chartered School for Girls, Maharaja College, Yuvaraja College, Music University, Government Girls' Home, and Maharaja Sanskrit Pathshala. The estimated cost for the project is Rs 968 crore. Heritage expert committee member Professor Rangaraju has provided a detailed report on the condition of these heritage buildings with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. Siddaramaiah emphasised the necessity of constructing new buildings for the safety of shopkeepers, students, and visitors. The Chief Minister assured that the funds for restoration and reconstruction would be allocated over the next four years. *—Salar News*

Chemicals in watermelons may ruin your health

The chemicals are easily available at cheap rates in local shops

VAISHNAVI GOPALRAJ
BENGALURU, 29 MAY

Fertilisers used are Forchlorfenuron that costs a mere Rs 30 per kg, and Calcium Carbide Rs 56 per kg *PHOTO: SALAR*

Watermelons are packed with nutrients and are a great summer fruit. However, the chemically grown ones can potentially lead to health concerns They can cause serious health problems, including cancer, thyroid issues, and liver and kidney damage, said a gastroenterologist at Dayanand Sagar Hospital,

Speaking on condition of anonymity, the doctor highlighted the long-term dangers. "These chemicals can lead to minor issues such as dizziness and fatigue, but also serious health problems that take years to develop," the doctor told **Salar News.**

A 2021 study titled 'The Use of Calcium Carbide in Fruit Ripening: Health Risks and Arsenic Index as a Quantitative Marker for Calcium Carbide Residue by University of Lagos' found that the heavy exposure to Calcium Carbide poses carcinogenic risk to different organs including liver, kidney, lung, and intestine and it might weaken immune system.

City-based nutritionist Deepika Vasudevan warned that the chemicals can strip the fruit of essential nutrients and leave behind toxic residues, disrupting human metabolism. "Chemical residues can increase potential of chronic diseases and accelerate ageing," she said.

However, even with the health risks, these chemicals are not illegal in India. Their easy availability and affordability at fertiliser shops are concerning. Forchlorfenuron costs a mere Rs 30 per kg, and Calcium Carbide Rs 56 per kg.

A State Food Safety and Standards official told **Salar News** that they are investigating the complaints about the watermelons and will soon release a report.

Vendors caught in middle

Sriram Sakthivel, a parent who bought a watermelon, told **Salar News** that he realised it was not organically grown after his 1-year-old child ate it. "The red dye was so persistent that it was hard to wash off our hands even with soap," he said.

The situation puts vendors in the crossfire. While facing customer complaints about the chemically treated fruit, they struggle to inspect each watermelon due to bulk purchases and limited profit margins. "We can't travel to the wholesale market to inspect every load. We barely make Rs 250 a day," said a street vendor in Basavanagudi.

Watermelons are priced between Rs 18 and Rs 25, with weights ranging from 3 kg to 5 kg.

Another vendor from KR Market told Salar News, "We order about 200 kg of watermelon from Nelamangala daily. Customers have complained about colour changes after cutting the fruit, but we can't check each watermelon as we buy in bulk. Most of the time, customers check and buy only the organic ones, leaving the chemically treated ones unsold, making it difficult for us to sell them." *—Salar News*

HOW TO CHOOSE A RIPE AND SAFE WATERMELON

1. Inspect the surface: Look for smooth, unblemished skin. Avoid watermelons with injection marks. Instead, opt for melons with web-like brown sugar spots on the rind, which are a natural sign of ripeness.
2. Colour check: Do not opt for dark green watermelon as it suggests higher risk of adulteration. Naturally grown fruits have yellow patches on the watermelon.
3. Beware of dust: Excessive dust on a pile of watermelons could be a sign of Calcium Carbide ripening.
4. Checking pre-cut watermelon: If buying pre-cut watermelon, inspect the flesh for a vibrant red colour. You can gently rub a tissue or cotton ball on the cut surface. If the tissue turns red, it could indicate artificial colouring. Opt for a different pre-cut melon if you suspect this.
5. Reporting concerns: If you suspect food safety violations, you can report them to the toll-free FSSAI helpline number 1800 11 2100 or email kumaresan.ch@fssai.go.

BEHIND BARS ON ARRIVAL

Prajwal will be arrested at airport when he lands: HM

BENGALURU, 29 MAY

Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara on Wednesday said suspended JD(S) leader Prajwal Revanna, who is facing charges of sexually abusing several women, will be arrested as soon as he arrives at the airport.

The statement comes two days after Prajwal released a video statement promising that he would appear before the Special Investigation Team (SIT), probing the cases against him, on 31 May.

According to official sources, Hassan MP has booked a return flight ticket to Bengaluru from Munich on 30 May, and is expected to land in the city in the small hours of 31 May.

Addressing reporters, Parameshwara said, "All necessary measures have to be taken, as a warrant has been issued against him (Prajwal). He has to be arrested. SIT is waiting, they will arrest him and will take his statement, and their (SIT) process will start."

Asked if Prajwal would be arrested at the airport on landing, he said, "it (arrest) has to be done there (at airport), as a warrant has been issued. So he will have to be arrested."

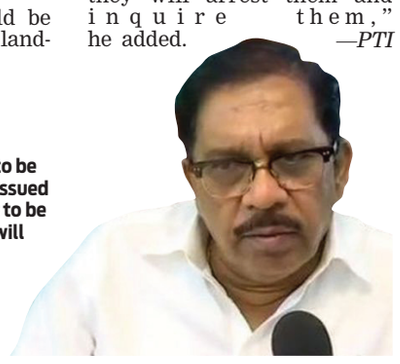
Prajwal Revanna *PHOTO: PTI*

A Special Court for Elected Representatives issued an arrest warrant on 18 May against Prajwal Revanna, following an application moved by the SIT.

To a question on the arrest of two persons by SIT in connection with the pen drive circulation case, the Home Minister said more than the question of Congress, BJP and JD(S), whoever is involved in this case, will be arrested.

"Already 11-12 people have been arrested, whoever they (SIT) feel are involved in the case, during the investigation, they will arrest them and inquire them," he added. *—PTI*

> **All necessary measures have to be taken, as a warrant has been issued against him (Prajwal). He has to be arrested. SIT is waiting, they will arrest him and will take his statement, and their (SIT) process will start**
> -G Parameshwara, Home Minister



2 officials of Valmiki corporation suspended in govt official's suicide

BENGALURU, 29 MAY

The State government on Wednesday suspended the Managing Director and an official of the Karnataka Maharshi Valmiki Scheduled Tribes Development Corporation Ltd over allegations of an illegal money transfer.

The unauthorised transfer of Rs 88.62 crore from the corporation's bank account came to light after an Accounts Superintendent Chandrashekhar died by suicide on Sunday evening, leaving behind a note.

The note purportedly named the corporation's Managing Director JG Padmanabh, Accounts Officer Parashuram G Durugannavar and Union Bank of India Chief Manager Suchismita Rawal, while also stating that minister in charge had issued oral orders for transferring the funds. Meanwhile, BJP has demanded the resignation of Scheduled Tribes Welfare Minister B Nagendra, following the allegations. Padmanabh and Durgannanavar have been suspended as they allegedly overlooked the creation of a new bank account that facilitated unauthorised transfer of funds. The FIR names several high-ranking officials of Union Bank of India, including Managing Director and CEO Manimekhalai, Executive Director Nitesh Ranjan, Ramasubrahmanyam, Sanjay Rudra, Pankaj Dwivedi, Shuchita, and other bank management personnel.

According to the government, the corporation had its savings bank account in the Vasanth Nagar branch of the Union Bank of India, but another account was opened in the MG Road branch of the bank without authorisation, and funds to the tune of Rs 187 crore was moved to the new account "illegally".

Home Minister G Parameshwara said that a CID probe is on.
—Salar News with Agencies

BJP wants Minister to quit

Veteran BJP leader BS Yediyurappa on Wednesday demanded the resignation of Scheduled Tribes Welfare Minister B Nagendra, following allegations of embezzlement of crores of rupees from a State-run corporation in his department, and a suicide death of an official linking him to it. Former Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister and BJP leader CN Ashwath Narayan also demanded action against Nagendra and CM Siddaramaiah. *—PTI*

Women throng post office amid false claims of cash incentives

Typically, 100-200 IPPB accounts are opened daily, but this surged to 700-800 accounts daily in the past week. More than 3,000 women had gathered at GPO's office on Wednesday *PHOTO: SALAR*

MEGHANA PRASAD
BENGALURU, 29 MAY

- The rush caused significant inconveniences, with instances of dehydration and collapses, prompting officials to provide medical aid

General Post Office (GPO) on Raj Bhavan Road has been witnessing a surge of women coming to open accounts with India Post Payment Bank (IPPB) for the last two weeks. This sudden rush occurred after a rumour, which had circulated on social media and local community groups since 6 May, falsely claimed that Monday was the deadline to register for a supposed cash guarantee scheme.

IPPB is a division of India Post that offers financial services, and it offers savings, and current and digital savings accounts. The 'scheme' indicated that political parties promised cash incentives in the lead-up to Lok Sabha elections, depositing Rs 6,000 and Rs 8,000 into IPPB accounts.

Consequently, hundreds of women, including senior citizens, new mothers, and those with young children flocked to the GPO fuelled by these misconceptions.

Speaking to Salar News, Chief Postmaster General, HM Manjesh said: "We have no idea who started these rumours. Despite the efforts to dispel the rumours, crowds continued to come in, with some women travelling long distances to reach GPO.

Notices were posted at entry gates to clarify that no such incentive programme existed. The rush caused significant inconveniences, with instances of dehydration and collapses, prompting officials to provide medical aid."

By Wednesday afternoon, more than 3,000 women had gathered at GPO over the past week. Typically, 100-200 IPPB accounts are opened daily, but this surged to 700-800 accounts daily in the past week. KR Lakshmi Narayana, Public Relations Inspector of Bengaluru GPO, said: "In May, 7,322 IPPB accounts have been opened." On average, around 60 IPPB accounts are opened in a month at GPO.

"Anybody can open saving accounts with IPPB by keeping a minimum deposit of Rs 200 while opening and the total amount deposited from 6 May is close to Rs 14.6 lakh."

Sunita (name changed) from Shivajinagar said, "We heard from other women that we will get Rs 6,000 from the government if we open this account before 4 June." Shanaya (name changed) from Tannery Road said, "We learned through social media that women will get Rs 8,500 monthly. So, we want to keep an account ready for it. We are a family who is struggling to make ends meet so I do not see any harm in getting this money. *—Salar News*

HM defends his statement on MLC candidates

BENGALURU, 29 MAY

Home Minister G Parameshwara on Wednesday defended his statement that Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and State Congress President DK Shivakumar should not finalise party candidates for upcoming MLC polls on their own, saying there was nothing wrong in it.

Noting that he suggested setting up a screening or a high power committee comprising senior party leaders to select the candidates, the Congress leader said it is too late now as the selection process seems to have reached the final stage, while the matter has reached the party high command in New Delhi. He had said Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar, should not unilaterally decide on the MLC candidates.

His statement comes against the backdrop of the leaders' trip to New Delhi, to discuss with the party high command candidates for biennial election to 11 seats in Karnataka Legislative Council.

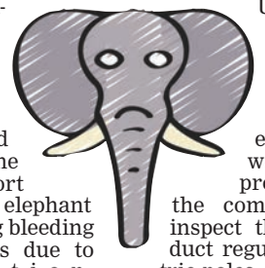
"There is no need to interpret my statement wrongly. What I said is there is a process of consulting everyone. I'm someone who has worked as the party President, consult is what I have said. No one can say what I have said is wrong. What will happen if consulted? Parameshwara said.
—PTI

8 DEATHS IN 5 MONTHS

Tusker dies of electrocution in Kodagu

BENGALURU, 29 MAY

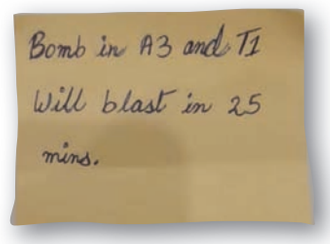
A 25-year-old elephant was killed after it came in contact with an electric pole on Tuesday night. The incident happened inside a coffee estate owned by ITC(Indian Tobacco Company) in Suntikoppa, Kodagu district. According to the Deputy Conservator of Forests in Madikeri, Bhaskar, the tusker had accidentally knocked over an electric pole, leading to its death. The Karnataka Forest Department has requested Chamundeshwari Electricity Supply Corporation Limited (CESCOM) to replace the electric poles with more durable concrete ones following the death. The incident came to light on Wednesday morning when the villagers found the elephant. The postmortem report revealed that the elephant suffered from lung bleeding and tusk injuries due to electrocution. Between January 2021 and May 2024, Karnataka lost 31 elephants to electrocution and in five months in 2024 the State lost eight elephants. Joseph Hoover, a former Forest Department Board Member and President of the United Conservation Movement, told Salar News, "This is the second elephant death due to electrocution in a week. There is no proper oversight by the committee set up to inspect the forest and conduct regular checks on electric poles, and we still lack to coordinate with the civic officials of respective department to ensure this incident to happen again and truly i can see the department have failed" he stated. On 25 May, an 18-year-old elephant was electrocuted in a coffee plantation near Tanduru village in Kodagu. Forest officials were alerted by labourers who discovered the carcass on next morning. An FIR was registered with the plantation owner for illegally tapping electricity from an overhead line, which is suspected to be the cause of death. *—Salar News*



- Karnataka Forest Department has requested CESCOM to replace the electric poles with durable concrete ones

KIA gets bomb threat on a sticky note left in bathroom

BENGALURU, 29 MAY



After checks, the authorities declared it a hoax *PHOTO: SALAR*

Bengaluru's Kempegowda International Airport received a bomb threat on Wednesday. A note on the men's washroom of Terminal 1 saying the airport would be rocked by a series of bomb blasts lead to panic among the flyers.

After thorough checks, the security officials declared it a hoax and operations resumed.

The note was found at 3.40am and by 7am the authorities declared it a hoax.

However the flight operations were not affected despite the incident. This marked the second false alarm at the airport in just two weeks.

On 17 May, a passenger on an Air India Express flight falsely claimed his check-in bag contained a bomb during security screening. He was subsequently booked for the hoax.

Last week, three-star hotels in Bengaluru received a bomb threat, and later, police declared it a hoax call.

According to an official, a traveler alerted airport staff about the note. *—Salar News*

SC REJECTS KEJRIWAL'S BAIL EXTENSION

The apex court said since he was given liberty to move the trial court, the plea is not maintainable

NEW DELHI, 29 MAY

The Supreme Court registry on Wednesday refused urgent listing of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's plea seeking extension of his interim bail by seven days for undergoing certain medical tests.

The apex court registry refused to accept the application, saying since Kejriwal was given liberty to move the trial court for regular bail, the plea is not maintainable. On Tuesday, a vacation bench comprising Justices JK Maheshwari and KV Viswanathan took note of the submissions of senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for the chief minister, and said the decision on the listing of the interim plea can be taken by the CJI as the judgement has been reserved in the main matter.

Kejriwal has sought extension of his interim bail by seven days to undergo a host of medical tests, including a PET-CT scan, in view of his "sudden and unexplained weight loss coupled with high ketone levels", which are indicative of kidney, serious cardiac ailments and even cancer.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal during an interaction with traders and commission agents at Town Hall, in Jalandhar **PHOTO: PTI**

The Chief Minister, in his fresh plea filed on 26 May, said he will surrender before jail authorities on 9 June instead of 2 June, the scheduled date for his return to prison.

The top court had on 10 May granted 21-day interim bail to the chief minister, who was arrested in a money laundering case linked to the excise policy 'scam', to enable him to campaign for the Lok Sabha polls. It had directed that Kejriwal shall surrender on 2 June, a day after the last phase of the seven-phase poll gets over. The matter relates to the alleged corruption and money laundering in the formulation and execution of the Delhi government's now-scrapped excise policy for 2021-22. —*PTI*

- The Supreme Court registry on Wednesday refused urgent listing of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's plea seeking extension of his interim bail by seven days for undergoing certain medical tests

SC refuses interim bail to AAP MLA for campaigning in Pb

NEW DELHI, 29 MAY

w The Supreme Court on Wednesday refused to grant interim bail to AAP MLA Jaswant Singh Gajjan Majra from Punjab, seeking interim bail to campaign for the ongoing Lok Sabha polls. Majra, who is a representative from the Amargarh Assembly constituency in Malerkotla, was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with a money laundering investigation linked to a bank fraud case. A vacation bench of Justices Sanjay Karol and Aravind Kumar issued notice to the ED and sought its response on the plea filed by Majra seeking interim bail till 4 June to campaign for the elections. Voting for Punjab's 13 Lok Sabha seats will take place in the seventh and final phase on 1 June. The counting of votes will be held on 4 June. —*ANI*

EC orders action against TV channel over exit polls

New Delhi, 29 May The Election Commission has directed its Odisha chief electoral officer to take immediate action against Nandighosha TV for telecasting exit poll results in the state, sources said on Wednesday. They pointed out that exit polls are prohibited under section 126A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, before the conclusion of elections in all phases. The seventh and last phase of the Lok Sabha polls will be held on Saturday. Assembly polls in Odisha are held simultaneously with the general elections. The Election Commission had notified the prohibited period from 7am of 19 April to 6.30 PM of 1 June through an order issued on 28 March, the sources said. —*PTI*

HC to hear Bibhav Kumar's plea tomorrow

NEW DELHI, 29 MAY

A Delhi High Court will hear on Friday a plea by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's close aide Bibhav Kumar against his arrest for allegedly assaulting AAP Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal earlier this month. The petition was mentioned for urgent listing before a bench of Acting Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet PS Arora which agreed to hear it on 31 May. Kumar, in his plea mentioned by advocate Rajat Bhardwaj, sought his arrest to be declared illegal, in gross violation of the provisions of Section 41A of the Code of Criminal Procedure, and against the mandate of law. He also sought appropriate compensation for his "illegal" arrest and initiation of departmental action against the "erring" officials who were behind the decision to arrest him. On Monday, Kumar's bail plea was dismissed by a Session's Court, which said there appeared no "pre-meditation" by Maliwal in lodging the FIR against him and that her allegations could not be "swiped away". PTI—*PTI*

SP leader Azam Khan's wife released from jail

RAMPUR, 29 MAY

Tazeen Fatima, wife of Samajwadi Party leader Mohd Azam Khan, was on Wednesday released from Rampur district jail after getting bail from the Allahabad High Court last week. Allahabad High Court had on 24 May granted bail to Azam Khan, his wife Fatima and son Abdullah Azam Khan in the fake birth certificate case. The three family members were convicted of forgery by a Rampur court. However, Azam Khan and Abdullah Azam Khan will have to remain behind bars as several other cases are also going on against them. Fatima was in jail since 28 October last year after conviction by the local court. The case dates back to 3 January, 2019, when Akash Saxena, who is now BJP MLA from Rampur, lodged a complaint alleging that Azam Khan and his wife got two birth certificates made for their son. —*PTI*

Infiltrators changing WB's border demography: Modi

KAKDWIP, 29 MAY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday alleged that demography in the border areas of West Bengal is changing because of infiltration and accused the TMC of indulging in the politics of appeasement so that illegal immigrants could settle in Bengal.

Modi also said that a major "political earthquake" is expected within the next six months after 4 June, the day when the results of the Lok Sabha election would be out. He claimed that the Trinamool Congress government in the state was giving away the rights of "original" OBCs to Muslims by issuing false caste certificates. He said, "The demography in the bordering areas of Bengal is being changed.

The TMC is against giving citizenship to religiously persecuted minorities. Why are they opposing the CAA so much? Why are these people (TMC leaders) lying about the CAA?" He asserted that the Matua community members would get Indian citizenship with all the respect that's due to them.

> **Mahatma Gandhi was a great soul. Wasn't it our responsibility to get him that level of global recognition during the last 75 years? Nobody knew, please excuse me on this. The first time, when the Gandhi film was made (1982), the world got curious about who he might bee**
>
> -Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

PM hints at 'conspiracy' behind Patnaik's health

Modi hinted at a "conspiracy" behind the "sudden deterioration of the health condition of Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik and said if BJP formed the government in the state, it will constitute a special committee to probe the facts.

Reacting strongly, Patnaik said: "Let me assure Modi that I am in perfect health and I have been campaigning in the state for the last month. —*PTI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with others during a public meeting ahead of Lok Sabha elections, in Mayurbhanj district on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Wast Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee greets supporters during an election roadshow in Kolkata on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Cong, TMC to take action if Modi's meditation is televised

BARUIPUR, 29 MAY

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and Congress alleged on Wednesday said that they will complain to the Election Commission if Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meditation in Kanyakumari is televised, alleging that it would amount to violation of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC).

Modi is scheduled to meditate at Vivekananda Rock Memorial, a monument built in tribute to Swami Vivekananda, in Kanyakumari following the culmination of Lok Sabha polls campaign on 30 May, according to BJP leaders. "Does anyone have to get cameras for doing meditation?" she asked, claiming that it was a way of campaigning during the silence period between the end of campaign and the poll date.

A delegation of Congress leaders Randeep Surjewala, Abhishek Singhvi and Syed Naseer Hussain met the Election Commission and handed over a memorandum in this regard along with 27 other complaints of alleged model code violations by BJP in the last few days.

According to BJP leaders, Modi will meditate from the evening of 30 May to the evening of 1 June at Dhyana Mandapam, the place where Vivekananda- a spiritual icon admired by Modi- is believed to have had a divine vision about 'Bharat Mata'. —*PTI*

> **One says Modi is the God of the gods... if he is God, then God should not do politics. God should not instigate riots. We will build a temple and will also offer him dhoklare**
>
> -Mamata Banerjee, WB Chief Minister

SECTION 144 VIOLATED

FIR against Mehbooba for MCC violation, her daughter cries foul

SRINAGAR, 29 MAY

Election authorities in Kashmir have registered an FIR against former chief minister and PDP president Mehbooba Mufti for allegedly violating Model Code of Conduct, officials said on Wednesday.

The FIR has been registered against Mehbooba for violating Section 144 after she and her party workers held a protest sit-in in the Bijbehara area of south Kashmir's Anantnag district, the officials said.

"Amusing to find an FIR filed against me for apparently flouting MCC. This is the price PDP has paid for speaking truth to power. Our protest was against GOI in cahoots with local administration for detaining hundreds of PDP polling agents and workers in the hours leading up to voting," she said.

The former chief minister of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir on Saturday staged a protest outside a police station in Jammu and Kashmir's Anantnag district, while polling was underway in the Anantnag-Rajouri Parliamentary seat in the sixth phase of Lok Sabha elections. She was protesting against the alleged detention of her party workers and polling agents.

The officials said the protest was a "gross violation" of the MCC.

"The huge group of PDP workers also blocked the main road and staged a protest at main stop Bijbehara (for) more than one hour which amounts (to) violations of the Section 144 CrPc which was imposed in the constituency," the FIR said.

Election authorities had imposed prohibitory orders under Section 144 CrPC from 6pm on 23 May till 6 pm on 25 May in the wake of the polling in the constituency and to uphold the sanctity of democratic principles. —*PTI*

> **An FIR has been registered against Mufti for MCC (model code of conduct) violation. This is intimidation and we are not going to take it lying down. We will not kneel our knees. We are here to speak truthd**
>
> -Iltija Mufti, PDP leader

Mehbooba Mufti **PHOTO: PTI**

Shehzades will blame EVM for defeat, says Shah

MAHARAJGANJ/ DEORIA, 29 MAY

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday took a jibe at Samajwadi Party and Congress, saying they have decided to blame electronic voting machines for their defeat in the Lok Sabha polls.

"The counting is on 4 June. In the afternoon the two 'shehzade' (Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav) will hold a press conference and say we lost the election because EVM was defective," he said.

"Modi has crossed 310 seats in five rounds. Rahul baba you will not get even 40 seats and the other 'shehzade' (Akhilesh Yadav) will just get four seats," he said. He said Opposition does not have a PM candidate and say that they will have five PMs in five years. Shah also asserted that this Lok Sabha election is a contest between those who constructed the Ram Temple in Ayodhya and those who opened fire at Ram bhakts.

Amit Shah **PHOTO: PTI**

At a poll meeting in Deoria in support of BJP candidate Shashank Mani Tripathi, he accused the Opposition of stalling the construction of the Ram Temple for over 70 years and said the temple could only be built because of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"This election is between the one who constructed Ram Temple and those who opened fire on Ram Bhakts," he said referring to the firing at karsevaks in 1990 when Mulayam Singh Yadav was the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister. Polling in Maharajganj and

Centre harming tourism sector in HP: Priyanka

SHIMLA, 29 MAY

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Wednesday accused BJP government at the Centre of harming small and medium businesses, including the tourism sector in Himachal Pradesh. Claiming that demonetisation and Goods and Service Tax implementation hit the tourism industry of the state, she promised to strengthen the sector with a focus on small and medium businesses if the Congress was voted to power in the Lok Sabha elections. Addressing an election rally in Kullu, Gandhi accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of handing over public property of the country such as ports, airports and coal mines to "his industrialists' friends". —*PTI*

Mani Shankar says sorry after BJP lashes out at Cong

NEW DELHI, 29 MAY

BJP spokesperson Gaurab Bhatia on Wednesday launched a scathing attack on Congress over Mani Shankar Aiyar's remark on the 1962 India-China war and said that this is an attack on the integrity of India, an insult to every soldier who sacrificed their life for the tricolour.

Later, in a brief statement, Aiyar said, "I unreservedly apologise for having mistakenly used the word 'alleged' before 'Chinese invasion' at the Foreign Correspondents Club this evening."

Addressing a press conference here today, Bhatia said, "Mani Shankar Aiyar says that in 1962 China allegedly invaded India.

Can this happen without the approval of Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge who are silent? Why this silence? We all know the relationship between India and China, India has been standing strong with pride showing China its place. At this time, this signal by Congress and Mani Shankar Aiyar shows the anti-India mindset of the Congress party."

"This is an attack on the integrity of India. This is an insult to every soldier who sacrificed his life for the tricolour," he added.

Further, he said that 1,400 Indian soldiers sacrificed their lives in the 1962 war and Mani Shankar Aiyar termed it as an "alleged" attack. —*ANI*

Shankar Aiyar **PHOTO: X/@AIYAR**

'Free ration gives people more food than they can eat'

KARAKAT, 29 MAY

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Wednesday claimed that under the free ration scheme, people were getting more foodgrains than they could consume and they ended up selling the surplus in the market.

The former BJP president, who was addressing an election rally in Karakat Lok Sabha constituency of Bihar, also, cited figures to assert that the food inflation rate in the country was "the lowest in the world" and expressed dismay over allegations of price rise.

"Are you not getting five kilogrammes of foodgrains each? I know if there are four members in a family, each is getting a supply of 5 kg and those who are not able to consume it, sell off the surplus," Singh said. —*PTI*

STAR WARS

Bhojpuri actors cross swords in Gorakhpur

GORAKHPUR, 29 MAY

With two Bhojpuri filmstars in the fray, both BJP and SP are relying on star power to bag the Gorakhpur Lok Sabha seat, considered a pocket borough of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.

While BJP is banking on sitting MP Ravi Kishan, the Samajwadi Party (SP) has fielded actress Kajal Nishad from the seat. A total of 13 candidates, including Bahujan Samaj Party's (BSP) Javed Simnani, are contesting from the seat, but political experts say the main fight is between the BJP and the SP.

Flaunting his success in the Bhojpuri film industry, Kishan is also wooing the voters by invoking the names of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Adityanath. At the same time, his opponent Nishad is often seen challenging the BJP candidate from the stage in a filmy style.

Bhojpuri filmstars Kajal Nishad and Ravi Kishan **PHOTO: PTI**

Nishad has been calling Kishan an "outsider" in Gorakhpur while claiming that she is the "daughter-in-law" of the people and "from your house". In his response, Kishan has said that as the sitting MP, he has been serving the people for the last five years. On the campaign trail, Kishan is seen trying his hand at wrestling with the youth and posing for selfies in a bid to strike a chord with the local residents. With Adityanath's prestige at stake, BJP is pulling out all stops to retain the seat and the chief minister often highlights Kishan's superstar status during his poll meetings. In the 19 elections held here so far, including two by-elections in 1970 and 2018, three generations of Gorakshapeeth have won the elections 10 times. Adityanath has tasted success five times, his guru Mahant Avedyanath four times and guru Mahant Digvijay Nath once.

With voting in Gorakhpur scheduled for 1 une, caste equations are also being played out.

There are a total of 20, 97,202 voters in the Gorakhpur parliamentary constituency, out of which 11,23,868 are male, 973160 female and 174 third gender voters. — *PTI*

104% rise in parties fighting for LS polls from 2009: ADR

NEW DELHI, 29 MAY

There has been an increase of 104 per cent in the number of political parties contesting Lok Sabha elections from 2009 to 2024, according to an analysis by poll rights body ADR.

According to the analysis, 751 political parties are participating in 2024 as compared to 677 who participated in 2019, 464 in 2014, and 368 in 2009.

This surge represents a staggering 104% increase from 2009 to 2024.

Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and National Election Watch have conducted a comprehensive analysis of the self-sworn affidavits of 8,337 candidates vying for seats in the upcoming Lok Sabha 2024 Elections.

Out of the total 8,360 contesting candidates, the breakdown reveals a diverse landscape of political representation: 1,333 from national parties, 532 from state parties, 2,580 from registered unrecognised parties and 3,915 independent candidates.

The analysis also sheds light on the prevalence of criminal cases among candidates.

Among national parties, 443 out of 1,333 candidates have declared criminal cases, with 295 facing serious criminal charges.

Out of the 440 BJP candidates contesting the Lok Sabha polls, 191 have declared criminal cases in their election affidavits, according to an analysis by a poll rights body.

For Congress, out of its 327 candidates, 143, or 44 per cent, have declared criminal cases, the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) said in a report based on data compiled from the affidavits on the Election Commission's website. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Two Naxalites killed in encounter in Chattisgarh

BIJAPUR, 29 MAY

Two Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security personnel in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Wednesday, police said. The gunfight took place in a forest under Madded police station limits when a team of security personnel was out on an anti-Naxal operation, a senior police official said. After guns fell silent, bodies of two Naxalites along with weapons were recovered from the spot, he said. The operation was still underway and further details were awaited, he said. With this incident, 118 Naxalites have been killed so far this year in separate encounters with security forces in the state. On 23 May, seven Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security personnel in a forest on Narayanpur-Bijapur inter-district border. *—PTI*

Delhi imposes fine of ₹2,000 for water wastage

NEW DELHI, 29 MAY

The Delhi government on Wednesday directed the DJB to impose a fine of Rs 2,000 for water wastage. The move comes amid an "acute shortage" of water faced by Delhi with Water Minister Atishi accusing Haryana of not releasing Delhi's share of water from the Yamuna River. The fine will be imposed for using hoses to wash cars, overflowing water tanks and use of domestic water for construction and commercial purposes, Atishi said. The minister directed the Delhi Jal Board CEO to immediately deploy 200 teams across the city to implement the measures to check water wastage. These teams will be deployed from 8 am on Thursday and impose fines on anyone found wasting water. *—PTI*

Illegal mining case: ED raids 13 places in Punjab

NEW DELHI, 29 MAY

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday carried out searches at 13 locations in the Ropar district of Punjab in the illegal mining case, officials said. Officials revealed that illegal mining activities were occurring on land previously seized by the ED in connection with the infamous Bhola drug case. The case is currently at a crucial stage of trial before the Special Prevention of Money Laundering Act court. The investigation has identified several individuals and entities involved in the illegal mining operations, including Nasibchand, a known mining mafia figure, and Shree Ram Stone Crushers. So far, the ED has recovered a total of Rs 3 crore. *—PTI*

One more arrested in Dombivli factory blast

THANE, 29 MAY

Police have arrested another director of a chemical company in connection with a reactor blast at its unit in Dombivli in Maharashtra last week which claimed 10 lives and left more than 60 injured, an official said on Wednesday. With this two directors of the company have so far been arrested in connection with the incident. The impact of the blast on 23 May at Amudan Chemicals unit, located in Dombivli area of Thane district, was so severe that it shattered window panes of houses and damaged cars, roads and electric poles in the vicinity. After the incident, the police had arrested Amudan Chemicals director Malay Mehta,38. On Tuesday, the police summoned the company's another director, Sneha Mehta, 35, the wife of Malay Mehta, and had placed her under arrest. *—PTI*

Hundreds affected by Manipur floods

Imphal River has inundated several areas

Residents divert water from a road during incessant rains, in Senapati district, in Manipur on Wednesday; Roads flooded near Lulu Mall in Kochi in Kerala PHOTO: PTI/SCREENGRAB

IMPHAL, 29 MAY

Hundreds of people have been affected by floods triggered by heavy rain in Manipur's Imphal Valley, an official said on Wednesday.

The overflowing Imphal River has inundated several areas, with water entering hundreds of houses, affecting several thousand people who have subsequently taken shelter at nearby community halls, he said.

"Due to incessant rainfall, the riverbank has been breached near Keirang, Khabam and Lairiyengbam Leikai areas in Imphal East district and water gushed into several areas, inundating hundreds of houses.

"Several areas in Heingang and Khurai assembly constituencies in Imphal East district have been badly affected, with floodwater at chest level in many parts," he said.

Chief Minister N Biren Singh said, "Due to breach in riverbank in several areas, many people and livestock have been affected. All authorities concerned, are working tirelessly to provide assistance to the affected people. Those stranded are being relocated to safe areas by boats." Meanwhile, Irang Bailey Bridge, a vital structure on NH 37 connecting Imphal and Silchar, has collapsed in Taobam village in Noney district following heavy rain on Tuesday evening, disrupting road communication, officials said.

Meanwhile, various districts in Kerala received moderate rains on Wednesday, even as the weather office forecast very heavy rainfall in five districts of the state in the coming hours. *—PTI*

Mizoram landslides toll rises to 29

Aizawl, 29 May

A day after 29 bodies were recovered from debris caused by massive landslides due to incessant rain across Mizoram, rescue operations continued on Wednesday to locate missing persons, an official report said. At least 14 people, were killed and around eight others were missing. *—PTI*

Delhi records max temp at 52.3°C

Delhi Lt Guv directs paid leave for workers

A woman splashes water on her face on a hot summer day amid heatwave, in New Delhi, on Wednesday PHOTO: PT

NEW DELHI, 29 MAY

Delhi's Mungeshpur area Wednesday logged a maximum of 52.3 degrees Celsius, the highest ever temperature recorded in the city, officials said.

On Tuesday, the weather station in the northwest Delhi locality recorded 49.9 degrees Celsius.

A day later, the temperature rose further with the weather station recording a maximum temperature of 52.3 degrees Celsius at 4.14 pm, according to the website.

An IMD official told PTI, this is the highest ever maximum temperature recorded so far in Delhi. Delhi Lt Governor VK Saxena on Wednesday directed that labourers at construction sites be given a paid break from 12 noon to 3 pm in view of the heatwave conditions in the city with temperatures hovering around 50 degrees Celsius in several parts.

The LG has directed that the three-hour break for labourers Meanwhile, Jammu District Magistrate has restricted the use of animals to draw any vehicle or carrying any load between 12 noon to 3 pm citing the ongoing high temperatures in the region, which may cause injuries or deaths of the animals. As per the notice, the order comes into force with immediate effect and shall remain in force for two months from the date of its issue or till the order is rescinded, whichever is earlier.

Incidents of forest fire in the areas in Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri Forest Division have been on the rise this summer season compared to last year, says an official. *—PTI/ ANI*

50 faints in Bihar amid heatwave

Sheikhpura, 29 May

At least 50 students fainted on Wednesday morning at Mankaul Middle School in the Ariari block of Sheikhpura district of Bihar, due to extreme heatwave conditions, as the temperature is soaring between 40 and 45 degrees Celsius in the district. Initially, six students lost consciousness. The incident began after the students attended an assembly for prayers and then proceeded to class. The whole matter created chaos in the school and the village. The unconscious students were provided with water and electrolytes and were immediately rushed to the district's Sadar hospital on bikes and e-rickshaws. *—PTI*

Human-animal conflict: Kerala to form nine teams

T'PURAM, 29 MAY

The Kerala government on Wednesday decided to constitute nine more Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) to mitigate human-wildlife conflicts in the state.

The decision was taken by a cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, a statement issued by his office said.

As part of implementing the decision, the cabinet gave permission to create nine posts each of Section Forest Officer, Forest Driver and Part-Time Sweeper in the Forest and Wildlife Department, the statement said.

The new RRTs are being formed at Palode in Thiruvananthapuram division, Thenmala in Punalur division, Vandanpatal in Kottayam division, Kadalar in Mankulam division, Kothamangalam in Kothamangalam division, Palapilli in Chalakudy division, Kollengode in Nenmara division, Karuvarakundu in Nilambur South division and Mananthavady in North Wayanad division, it said.

The decision to set up additional RRTs comes in the wake of animal attacks in the state, especially in areas close to forests, by elephants and tigers that claimed a few lives earlier this year. Besides this, the cabinet also decided to appoint Director General of Prosecutions T A Shaji as the State Public Prosecutor in the Kerala High Court for a period of three years from 2 June, the statement said. *—PTI*

27 people were killed and several others injured in the fire that broke out in a gaming zone, in Rajkot on Saturday PHOTO: PTI

Rajkot fire: 1 held; SIT to probe IPS, IAS officials

AHMEDABAD, 29 MAY

The Gujarat police have arrested one more partner of the Rajkot-based TRP game zone where a fire last week killed 27 people, while another accused died in the blaze, officials said on Wednesday.

The total number of arrests in connection with the incident has now gone up to five, according to police.

Kiritsinh Jadeja, a partner in Raceway Enterprises, which operated the game zone, was arrested from Rajkot-Kalavad road on Tuesday night, Rajkot Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime) Parthrajsinh Gohil said.

Jadeja is among six partners of the TRP game zone named as accused in the fire incident and booked under various Indian Penal Code provisions, including culpable homicide not amounting to murder.

"Out of six people named in the FIR, one Prakash Hiran has died in the fire. During examination, the DNA sample of one of the deceased matched with that of Hiran's kin, confirming his death," Gohli said.

The police had earlier arrested Yuvrajsinh Solanki, Rahul Rathod, Dhaval Thakkar, all game zone partners, and its manager Nitin Jain, as per officials.

SIT Chief set up to probe the Rajkot game zone fire said on Wednesday that they have been given the go-ahead to question even senior IAS and IPS officials if the probe warranted.

In a related development, the Rajkot collector said that the DNA samples of all the victims have been matched with their relatives.

The Special Investigation Team chief Subhash Trivedi spoke to the media after Gujarat Minister of State for Home Harsh Sanghavi met the SIT members in Gandhinagar and reviewed the progress in the probe. The game zone operators had stored over 30 litres of petrol on their premises. *—PTI*

Goods rail derails in Mumbai, 41 trains cancelled

MUMBAI, 29 MAY

The Western Railway has cancelled or rescheduled several trains following the derailment of a goods train at Palghar railway station in Maharashtra and the restoration work was on a day after the incident, officials said on Wednesday.

As many as 41 trains were cancelled, 28 partially cancelled, 12 diverted and 22 trains were rescheduled till Wednesday afternoon, Western Railway officials said.

Western Railway said Mumbai local train services to and from Dahanu Road (in Palghar district) will be resumed by evening. Seven wagons of the goods train derailed at Palghar, located around 100 km from Mumbai, at 5.08 pm on Tuesday, affecting the traffic of Mumbai-bound trains coming from Gujarat, a railway spokesperson earlier said here.

As per railway sources, seven wagons including the guard's van from the rear end derailed, and some of them fell on their sides with iron coils thrown off over the tracks.The goods train with 43 wagons and carrying iron coils was heading to Karambeli in Gujarat from Visakhapatnam. *—PTI*

Restoration work underway due to the derailment of wagons of a goods train at Palghar yard, on Wednesday PHOTO: PTI

PHOTO: ANI

BANGLADESH MP BODY PARTS FOUND IN SEPTIC TANK

KOLKATA, 29 MAY

Flesh found in the septic tank of the Kolkata housing complex where Bangladeshi MP Anwarul Azim Anar was allegedly killed earlier this month will be sent for forensic tests, the neighbouring country's police detective department chief said.

The Bangladesh Detective Department chief Harun-or-Rashid, who arrived in India on Sunday said that any development in the case could only be confirmed once results on the flesh samples are recieved.

"We have opened the sewage line and septic tank of that duplex flat (murder site) with the help of West Bengal CID and have found flesh there," Harun-or-Rashid told media people.

"It will be sent for forensic and DNA tests, and only after that, something can be said... Only after forensic and DNA tests can we tell whose flesh it is..." he said.

The Chief of the Bangladesh Detective Department is currently in India.

"We also got many digital evidences and we will also record the statement of the accused butcher. After interrogation, we matched the statement with our accused in Bangladesh. We also got circumstantial evidence and we are matching it..." he had said earlier.

Harun-or-Rashid arrived with a police team in Kolkata on Sunday afternoon and described the killing of Anar as "cold-blooded, barbaric murder." He had stated that he had never seen such a heinous planned murder. *—PTI*

Pune crash: Panel to probe juvenile board

PUNE, 29 MAY

The Maharashtra state's Woman and Child Development Department has established a five-person committee to investigate whether the Juvenile Justice Board (JJ Board) members, appointed by the state, followed correct legal procedures when granting bail to the teenager involved in the 19 May Pune car accident. The incident resulted in the deaths of two motorcycle-borne people.

Meanwhile, Maharashtra Congress President Nana Patole claimed some "high profile" people, including an MLA's son. Prashant Narnawre, Commissioner of the Women and Child Development Department in Pune, spoke about the composition and responsibilities of the JJ Board.

"JJ Board consists of 3 members (1 from the judiciary, and the rest 2 get appointed from the government). We are the appointing authority of the 2 members from the state government at the JJ Board. As per the JJ Act, if we have doubts about the conduct of any of these 2 appointed state government members, we can constitute a committee and take the required action," Prashant Narnawre said.

Narnawre stated, "The committee has been appointed and has started its work. A report is expected next week, and once the report is submitted, I will also make a remark on this and submit it to the Maharashtra government for further action."

According to reports, Dr Taware the head of the state-run Sassoon Hospital's forensic medicine department had frequent phone conversations with Vishal Agarwal, the father of the accused in the Porsche accident, raising suspicions of potential collusion. Agarwal has reportedly called Taware 14 times to follow up on the blood samples. *—PTI*

BIHAR GUV DIRECTS STRICT ACTION ON STUDENT'S MURDER

PATNA, 29 MAY

Bihar Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar has directed to take strict action against the culprits in the case where a student of BN College in Patna was beaten to death by a group of masked men.

The victim was identified as Harsh Kumar, 22 and was going to take an exam on Monday when some masked men started beating him.

The governor called the Vice Chancellor of Patna University, District Officer of Patna and Senior Superintendent of Police to Raj Bhavan, took detailed information of the case and directed him to take strict action against the culprits.

He directed to identify the people who create chaos in the hostels. He said that a strict eye should be kept on such mischievous and chaotic elements and if any information is received in this regard, the police should be informed immediately. *—PTI*

SC INTERFERES

'Don't terminate 25-wk pregnancy'

NEW DELHI, 29 MAY

The Supreme Court has rejected a plea filed by a woman seeking permission to terminate her over 25-week pregnancy, but refrained from making public the reasons for its decision to protect her privacy.

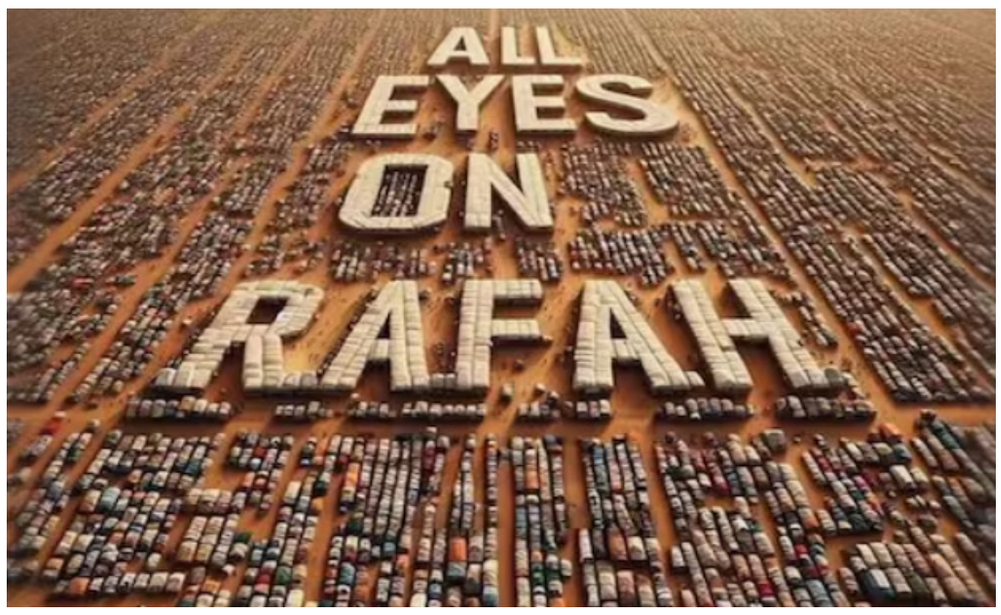
A vacation bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Satish Chandra Sharma perused a report filed by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi which was asked by the apex court last week to ascertain the physical condition of the woman and her foetus.

"We have perused the report dated 24 May, 2024 submitted by All India Institute of Medical Sciences. We are not quoting what is mentioned in the report for protecting the privacy of the petitioner.

"But in the light of the report we cannot permit termination of pregnancy in the facts of the case. The report shall remain on record in sealed envelope. The writ petition is rejected," the bench said in its order passed on 27 May.

It had passed the order on a plea of the woman who claimed she came to know about her pregnancy only on 17 May. Under the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, aborting a foetus that is more than 24 weeks old can be allowed only in cases of substantial foetal abnormality as diagnosed by a medical board or if an opinion is formed in good faith for the purpose of saving the life of the pregnant woman. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI



ALL EYES ON RAFAH

As Israeli troops continue their progress in a ground offensive on the heavily populated city of Rafah in the Gaza Strip, a campaign by activists and humanitarian groups with the slogan "All Eyes on Rafah" has picked up steam to create awareness on the ongoing war. Here is the campaign poster that's breaking the internet ***PHOTO: PTI***

Modi's way to 3rd term in Delhi is through UP's 70 seats

As India votes to elect a new government, all eyes are on the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, commonly known by its initials UP.

Spread over an area roughly the size of Britain, the state packs in nearly four times as many people. With an estimated 257 million people, it is India's most populous state and would be the fifth largest in the world if it was an independent country after India, China, United States and Indonesia and ahead of Pakistan or Brazil.

The state is among just three in India which are voting in all seven phases in the elections which are spread over 44 days.

So, it's no surprise that UP - which elects 80 MPs in the 543-member lower house of parliament (the Lok Sabha) - is considered key to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's re-election bid as he seeks to return for a third consecutive term.

"It's commonly said that 'the way to Delhi is through UP' and a party that does well in the state generally goes on to rule India," says Sharat Pradhan, senior journalist in the state capital, Lucknow.

Modi held his seat in the ancient city of Varanasi in 2019 and aims to do so again.

So, Modi has been on a whirlwind tour of the state, doing roadshows and addressing rallies – sometimes up to seven in a single day – to convince voters to support his party.

In 2014, BJP won 71 seats in the state and in 2019, it got 62. This time, party leaders say, they're aiming for 70 plus – even all of its 80 seats.

The maths, the Opposition Congress party's Gaurav Kapoor says, its simple – "a party that wins 70 seats here needs just 202 more to form a government".

Earlier this month, when Modi arrived in the city to file his nomination, accompanied by the state's Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, a saffron-robed Hindu monk-turned-politician, thousands of supporters gathered to cheer them on.

UP has been a successful political laboratory for BJP since 2014 with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath being Prime Minister Narendra Modi's right hand; Ayodhya Ram Mandir has been a poll pitch for BJP ***PHOTO: X/PTI***

A truck painted saffron – the colour associated with the BJP – and decorated with marigold flowers carried them as their cavalcade made its way through the narrow streets of the ancient city.

Modi waved and held up a replica of the lotus flower – his party symbol – as men and women dressed in saffron clothes and caps raised slogans in support.

It's not just the BJP that's eyeing the state regarded as "the biggest prize" in Indian election. Congress, which was dominant in the state for four decades until it was edged out by local parties in 1991, is fighting here in alliance with the regional Samajwadi Party (SP). The alliance has also claimed that "we are winning 79 seats, have a fight in one".

Counting of votes on 4 June is likely to show claims on both sides are exaggerated, but analysts point out that all the elections in the past 10 years in the state have gone in the BJP's favour. And the upbeat mood at Modi's roadshow reflected that self-assurance.

Most Varanasi residents in the crowd talked about the transformation their city has undergone in the past decade – the new highways that have been built, the expansion of the Kashi-Vishwanath temple and the spruced-up banks of the river Ganges.

Watching Modi's procession from his shop along the route of the roadshow, Ambrish Mittal, a chemist, says "the city roads are cleaner and the long power cuts that plunged the city into darkness for hours are history".

But despite its political significance, UP remains among India's poorest states - though there have been some positive changes in the past few years.

Government data shows that millions more now have electricity, access to toilets and are using clean fuel compared to five years ago.

But UP still has the largest concentration of poor in the world – with 23% of its population recorded as multidimensionally poor even after tens of millions have been lifted out of poverty.

The state also records tens of thousands of violent crimes against women every year and continues to make headlines for cases where the accused are politically influential men.

And although these ills have plagued the state historically, Opposition parties have seized upon them and been raising them at their campaign rallies as the BJP has been in power nationally for a decade and also ruled UP for seven years now.

The huge turnout at their meetings, opposition leaders say, reflects voter disenchantment with BJP.

"Until a few weeks back, election in the state had seemed like a one-sided contest with the odds stacked against us," says Abhishek Yadav, a Samajwadi Party youth wing leader and a star campaigner for his party.

But he feels that the opposition's campaign has gathered pace as unemployment and price rise have become main issues.Ashwani Shahi of BJP, however, blames opposition parties for everything that's wrong with the state.

"In 2017 when the BJP won UP, we inherited a state which was poor, had high rates of illiteracy and unemployment. We have started work to change that."But it takes time to uplift people from poverty. I think by 2029, we'll be able to take 90% people out of poverty."

Shahi admits there is some anti-incumbency, but the BJP will still romp home in Uttar Pradesh – and the rest of India because of Modi. *—BBC News*

SALAR

Urbanisation leads to 60% more night-time warming

Urbanisation has led to nearly 60 per cent more night-time warming in over 140 prominent Indian cities compared to non-urban areas surrounding them, a new research from the Indian Institute of Technology Bhubaneswar has found.

According to the research, Ahmedabad, Jaipur and Rajkot had the highest urban effect, while Delhi-NCR and Pune were found to be at the fourth and fifth position, respectively.

Urbanisation is known to be responsible for the urban heat island (UHI) effect, in which the concrete and asphalt (used in constructing roads and pavements) surfaces store heat during the day and release it in the evening, thereby raising night-time temperatures.

Over time, this heat further affects other aspects of climate, including rainfall and pollution, researchers said in the study published in the journal Nature Cities.

The study sought to determine how much urbanisation and local climate change each contributed to raising night-time temperatures over the past two decades (2003-2020).

"The mean urban effect for all these cities across India was found to be 0.2 degrees Celsius per decade. This leads to an estimate of 37.73 per cent of the total urban warming being linked to urbanisation -- that is, nearly 60 per cent enhancement of warming relative to the surrounding non-urban areas," the authors wrote.

They also found that cities in the northwestern, northeastern and southern regions showed a "more pronounced increase" in night-time temperatures than in the other parts of the country.

- According to research, Ahmedabad, Jaipur and Rajkot had the highest urban effect, while Delhi-NCR and Pune were found to be at the 4th and 5th

However, the contribution of urbanisation towards night-time warming was higher in the eastern and central Indian cities, which are developing and thereby, undergoing rapid expansion, the researchers said.

Almost all the cities, included in the analysis, showed rising night-time surface temperatures, which have increased by about 0.53 degrees Celsius on average every decade.

Further, the trend of hotter night-time temperatures was not limited to the cities, as most of India warmed by 0.26 degrees Celsius on average every decade during the period studied.

This indicated that cities were warming at almost double the rate at which the whole country was warming, they said.

The authors explained that as cities are highly vulnerable to the combined effects of urbanisation and climate change, the people and the infrastructure in these areas are on the "frontlines" of climate change consequences, such as heatwaves, extreme weather events and flooding.

They said the study highlighted the need for diverse mitigation efforts for effectively lowering the ongoing urban warming.

According to an analysis by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), New Delhi, cities are not cooling down at night like they used to during 2001-2010 because they have "become more concretised in the last two decades" contributing to the rise in heat stress.

They said that while increasing green cover can moderate day-time heat, it is ineffective for arresting night-time heat.

According to the World Resources Institute (WRI) India Ross Center, seven out of 10 people around the world are projected to live in urban areas by 2050. While about 90 per cent of the growth is expected to happen in the Global South, a significant fraction of this will occur in India, it said.

Currently, 36 per cent of India's population, or about 40 crore, is urban and will double to 80 crore by 2050, according to the WRI India Ross Center.

With India projected to become the fastest growing economy globally, and expected to witness the greatest urban growth, the latest findings could help urban planners and policymakers better allocate resources and understand the scale of planning required for building sustainable cities, the authors said. *—PTI*

Urbanisation is responsible for urban heat island effect, in which concrete and asphalt surfaces store heat during day and release it in evening, thereby raising night temperatures ***PHOTO: FREEPIK***

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

They stole our jobs & life: Anger & desperation in WB's coal belt

Amar Baran Paul can never forget how the ground below him shook and more than 25 houses around him collapsed four years ago in Harishpur town in West Bengal.

Harishpur is located near Madhabpur opencast coal mine — where coal is extracted from the surface of the ground and not by digging the ground — operated by Eastern Coalfield Limited (ECL). It is in the Asansol-Raniganj coal belt in West Bengal's Paschim Bardhaman district, about a six-hour drive from the state capital, Kolkata.

The belt, which has 146 villages, has been extensively mined since the 17th century, and land subsidence incidents like the one in Harishpur, which occurred when the ground near the opencast mine collapsed, are common in the area.

"In July 2020, the road nearing our township suddenly sank and cracks began emerging on houses near this road. Soon after, we could feel tremors and the walls of some houses began falling," Paul, a retired ECL employee, said. "More than 20 people lost their homes overnight."

Sitting on the verandah of his home where the cracks on the walls were clearly visible, Paul said more than 400 residents were forced to flee Harishpur after the land subsidence. Paul's family found a house on rent near the town but the steep rent made them return to their damaged home.

Traditionally, the coal belt is also home to some of India's poorest communities, which suffer from malnutrition. That makes them more vulnerable to tuberculosis if they are affected by CWP, Carr said.

Madhivi Bauri's 30-year-old daughter-in-law Asha Bauri said she fears for their children's future and hopes to leave the village.

Staring at the mine — which resembles a low-lying hill — near his house and describing how the mine lights up with fire at night after blasting ends just before sunset, Manik Bauri lamented that no politician cares about them.

Demands unheard but dependent on the coal industry

India's coal industry was nationalised by then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1973. The blanket order applied to all the coal mines in the country and ensured that coal mining would be exclusively reserved for the public sector. However, the Coal Mines (Nationalisation) Act of 1973 was amended in 1993 to allow limited private-sector participation in coal mining.

From top left: Amar Baran Paul, a retired ECL employee, with his 29-year-old specially-abled son; a house affected by a landslide; Maku Hazda, an Adivasi woman who fought against the Deucha Pachami coal mine project; A man allegedly carries sacks of illegally mined coal on a bicycle ***PHOTOS: AL JAZEERA***

Nationalisation formalised the industry and, in turn, boosted the black sedimentary rock's monetary value politically, according to Gareth Price, a senior research fellow at the Irish think tank The Azure Forum for Contemporary Security Strategy.

India is currently the second largest producer of coal. To cut down on coal imports, the Modi government has been leasing out coal mines to private companies. According to the country's Ministry of Coal, 104 blocks have been auctioned under commercial mining.

A career in illegal coal smuggling

Anup Das, 22, who lives in a village along West Bengal's Barabani railway station in Paschim Bardhaman district, welcomed the coal projects. The coal sliding along this track is a private project.

According to a 2019 report by the Press Trust of India news agency, throughout the Asansol-Raniganj belt, in about 3,500 illegal coal mines, at least 35,000 people are directly employed (work in the mines), while another 40,000 get indirect employment (involved in supplying the coal to factories or are involved in handling coal hauling). Illegal mines do not have the government's permission to exist. People working in them are also not given any official employment papers.

The illegal coal typically fetches 30 percent less than the price of the legal coal — but it is still better than no income for Das and others like him.

Swaraj Das, an activist from the Project Affected People's Association — a group comprising people who have been affected by coal mines — emphasised the need for investment in education and jobs in the region so people living near mines can end their dependence on the coal industry. "We have been protesting against open cast mining for years and currently spend time documenting the sordid living conditions of people living near the mines, and the illegal activities taking place in these mines to raise awareness about the dangers of coal mining," he said.

'Give Adivasis more power'

There has also been pressure on India from the West and the United Nations to tackle climate change.

More than 9,000 Indigenous people have protested against the trans-state opencast mining project.

Those protests have slowed down the progress of the implementation of the $297m project as developers have not been able to reach the land near the Adivasi community. If fully implemented, it could become Asia's largest coal mine and the second largest in the world.

Sitting along a glistening stream that passes through his hut, Murmu pulled out his bow and arrow and displayed how they used it to drive coal mine developers away from their land. *—AL Jazeera*

PHOTO: ARAB NEWS

140 Muslims held for attacking Christians in Pak

LAHORE, 29 MAY

Pakistan's Punjab police on Wednesday claimed to have arrested a total of 140 suspects involved in attacking members of the Christian minority, their properties and police personnel on the issue of alleged desecration of the Quran. A charged mob led by radical Islamist Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) activists last week attacked the Christian community in Mujahid Colony in the Sargodha district of Punjab, some 200 km from Lahore, that left two Christians and 10 policemen injured. The mob burned and ransacked the homes and properties of the Christians. According to Punjab police spokesperson Mubashir Hussain, some 140 suspects involved in the Sargodha incident have been taken into custody so far. *—PTI*

US appoints a new representative to Taiwan

TAIPEI, 29 MAY

The United States has appointed a new representative to Taiwan, as China boosts its threats against the self-ruled island following the election of a new president who wants the territory to maintain its de-facto independence. China claims Taiwan as its own territory and this week staged naval and air force drills that surrounded the island in a simulated blockade. The American Institute in Taiwan that acts as the de-facto embassy in Taipei said Wednesday that veteran diplomat Raymond Greene would take over from Sandra Oudkirk beginning in the summer of 2024. The US cut formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan in 1979 and established official relations with the People's Republic of China, then a Cold War ally against the Soviet Union. *—AP*

Weinstein is expected to appear before judge

NEW YORK, 29 MAY

Harvey Weinstein is expected to appear before a judge Wednesday afternoon in the same New York City courthouse where former President Donald Trump is on trial. Weinstein is awaiting a retrial on rape charges after his 2020 conviction was tossed out. Wednesday's court hearing will address various legal issues related to the upcoming trial, which is tentatively scheduled for some time after Labor Day. Weinstein's original trial was held in the same courtroom where Trump is on trial now, but the two men are unlikely to bump into each other. Weinstein is in custody and will be brought to and from the courtroom under guard. He will be appearing in a courtroom on a different floor than where Trump is currently on trial. *—AP*

Albert Ruddy producer of 'The Godfather' dies

NEW YORK, 29 MAY

Albert S. Ruddy, a colorful, Canadian-born producer and writer who won Oscars for "The Godfather" and "Million Dollar Baby," developed the raucous prison-sports comedy "The Longest Yard" and helped create the hit sitcom "Hogan's Heroes," has died at age 94. Ruddy died "peacefully" Saturday at the UCLA Medical Center, according to a spokesperson, who added that among his final words were, "The game is over, but we won the game." Tall and muscular, with a raspy voice and a city kid's swagger, Ruddy produced more than 30 movies and was on hand for the very top and very bottom, from the "Godfather" and "Million Dollar Baby" to "Cannonball Run II" and "Megaforce," nominees for Golden Raspberry awards for worst movie of the year. *—AP*

Israel shrugs off UNSC bid to 'stop the killing'

An Israeli soldier waves to the camera as he moves on the top of a tank near the Israeli-Gaza border, as seen from Southern Israel on Tuesday

Photo: AP/PTI

New air attacks were reported across the southernmost city

TEL AVIV, 29 MAY

Israel has continued its assault on Rafah, ignoring a draft resolution to the UN Security Council to "stop the killing" in the city in southern Gaza.

New air attacks were reported across the southernmost city on Wednesday morning, hours after witnesses and a Palestinian security source said Israeli tanks had penetrated the heart of Rafah.

"People are currently inside their homes because anyone who moves is being shot at by Israeli drones," resident Abdel Khatib said. Israeli air strikes targeted various parts of the city, including the vicinity of the Badr camp and the Zourob roundabout west of the city, according to Palestinian news agency Shehab.

A complete shutdown of telecommunications and internet services throughout Rafah is also reported. "The military now has control over the Philadelphi Corridor and is advancing deeper into the remaining part of the corridor – to the western part of Rafah city."

The military now has control over the Philadelphi Corridor and is advancing deeper into the remaining part of the corridor – to the western part of Rafah city

Al Jazeera's Hani Mahmoud, reporting from Deir el-Balah, said that Israel "continues to herd people from one place to another" amid the attacks. Previously, as it attacked targets in northern and central Gaza, Israel's military had designated Rafah as a safe zone.

Now, close to one million people are reported to have left Rafah as the Israeli assault maps out. Israel's allies have warned against the attack on the city, citing the risk of civilian casualties and the building humanitarian crisis.

"Those who have been told to stay in al-Mawasi evacuation zone to avoid being bombed are finding themselves on the move again, seeking shelter elsewhere. But there is no safe place in a war zone. Bombing is taking place everywhere, not only in Rafah, but also in Khan Younis and in the rest of the Strip," Mahmoud reported. Israeli shelling and airstrikes killed at least 37 people, most of them sheltering in tents, outside the southern Gaza city of Rafah overnight and on 28 May— pummelling the same area where strikes triggered a deadly fire days earlier in a camp for displaced Palestinians — according to witnesses, emergency workers and hospital officials.

—Al Jazeera/ AP

Thailand's Ex-PM to be indicted for defamation

Former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra

PHOTO: X@CORNELIUSHANUNG

BANGKOK, 29 MAY

Thai prosecutors said Wednesday former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra will be indicted for defaming the monarchy, three months after he was freed on parole on other charges.

Thaksin will not yet be indicted because he had filed a request to postpone his original appointment on Wednesday with proof that he has Covid-19, Prayuth Bejraguna, a spokesperson for the Office of the Attorney General, said at a news conference.The attorney general's office scheduled a new appointment for Thaksin's indictment on June 18, Prayuth said, adding that Thaksin will also be indicted for violating the Computer Crime Act.

The law on defaming the monarchy, an offense known as lese majeste, is punishable by three to 15 years in prison. It is controversial not only because critics consider it harsh, but also because they charge it is used for political purposes to punish government critics.

Thaksin was ousted by a military coup in 2006. His opponents then had accused him of disrespecting King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who died in 2016. Thaksin's ouster set off years of struggle between his supporters and his opponents, who were generally staunch royalists. The political polarization led to unprecedented public debate about the monarchy's role, which sharpened when student-led protests for greater democracy took the the streets in 2020.

Thaksin had been in self-imposed exile since 2008, but returned to Thailand in August last year to begin serving an eight-year sentence on charges related to corruption and abuse of power. *—AP*

Noorullah Essazai, a government health official in Washuk district where the incident happened, confirmed the number of deaths, adding that a total of 54 passengers were travelling in the bus

PHOTO: DAWNNEWS TV

Pak: At least 28 killed after bus falls into ravine

ISLAMABAD, 29 MAY

At least 28 people have been killed in Pakistan's southwestern province of Balochistan after a bus they were travelling in fell into a ravine, officials say.

The bus from Turbat city in southern Balochistan was headed towards the provincial capital of Quetta, about 750km to the north, when it crashed in the mountainous region early on Wednesday morning.

Noorullah Essazai, a government health official in Washuk district where the incident happened, confirmed the number of deaths to Al Jazeera, adding that a total of 54 passengers were travelling in the bus.

Some of the survivors have sustained serious injuries, he said, and are being treated at a local hospital. "We have eight to 10 critically injured patients and are making arrangements to send them to Quetta by helicopter while some others will be shifted to a hospital in Khuzdar," said Essazai, referring to a town 120km away.

Muhammad Ismail, a government official in Washuk, said the bus crashed through a bridge and fell into a rocky ravine. The bus driver is among the dead. In a statement, Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif expressed his condolences over the incident and directed the authorities to help the injured. "We stand with the bereaved families in this difficult time and express our heartfelt sympathies with them," said the statement issued by the prime minister's office. In another statement, Balochistan's Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti expressed his sadness at the loss of lives.

—Al Jazeeras

SA: 2 held over ballot tampering allegations

JOHANNESBURG, 29 MAY

Two representatives of an unnamed political party have been arrested over allegations they tried to tamper with ballot boxes.

Police are also investigating two other cases of suspected interference in the special poll, which allowed South Africans with special needs to vote early on Monday and Tuesday. Chief Electoral Officer Sy Mamabolo said on Wednesday: "Interference with the unfolding electoral programme, logistics, handlings or intimidation of electoral staff cannot be justified as vigilance.

"It is now up to all of us to work together to ensure that these elections are free, fair and secure – and that the outcome reflects the will of the South African electorate."

Ex-President Motlanthe says ANC needs 'every vote'. South Africa's third leader Kgalema Motlanthe voted with his wife, Gugu Motlanthe, at the Killarney Country Club in Johannesburg.

He told reporters he voted for ANC and "each and every vote counts" for the party. Motlanthe was president for six months in 2009.

—BBC News

'BIZARRE ATTITUDE'

N Korea drops trash balloons on South

SEOUL, 29 MAY

North Korea flew hundreds of trash-carrying balloons toward South Korea in one of its most bizarre provocations against its rival in years, prompting the South's military to mobilise chemical and explosive response teams to recover objects and debris in different parts of the country.

The ballooning campaign came as North Korean leader Kim Jong Un urged his military scientists to overcome a failed satellite launch and continue developing space-based reconnaissance capabilities, which he described as crucial for countering US and South Korean military activities, state media said Wednesday.

In his first public comments about the launch failure, Kim also warned of unspecified "stern" action against South Korea over an exercise involving 20 fighter jets near the inter-Korean border hours before North Korea's failed launch on Monday.

The South's military said about 260 North Korean balloons were found dropped in various parts of the country

PHOTO: X/YONHAP

In another sign of tensions between the war-divided rivals, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said North Korea also has been flying large numbers of balloons carrying trash toward the South since Tuesday night, in an apparent retaliation against South Korean activists for flying anti-Pyongyang propaganda leaflets across the border.

The South's military said about 260 North Korean balloons were found dropped in various parts of the country as of Wednesday afternoon and were being recovered by military rapid response. There were no immediate reports of damage caused by the balloons. Similar North Korean balloon activities damaged cars and other property in 2016. Kim Jong Un's comments about the satellite were from a speech at the North's Academy of Defense Sciences, which he visited a day after a rocket carrying what would have been his country's second military reconnaissance satellite exploded shortly after liftoff. North Korea's aerospace technology administration said the explosion was possibly related to the reliability of a newly developed rocket engine. *—AP*

UKRAINE WAR

Police search the EU over suspected Russian intrusion

BRUSSELS, 29 MAY

Belgium's federal prosecutor's office said on Wednesday that police carried out searches at the residence of an employee of the European Parliament and at his office in the Parliament's building in Brussels over suspected Russian interference.

Prosecutors said in statement that the suspect's office in Strasbourg, where the EU Parliament's headquarters are located in France, was also searched in partnership with the EU's judicial cooperation agency, Eurojust, and French judicial authorities.

The raids took place less than two weeks before Europe-wide polls on June 6-9 to elect a new EU parliament.

The investigation was announced last month by Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo, who said his country's intelligence service has confirmed the existence of a network trying to undermine support for Ukraine. "The searches are part of a case of interference, passive corruption and membership of a criminal organisation and relates to indications of Russian interference," prosecutors said. *—AP*

SWEDEN TO DONATE $1.23B IN MILITARY AID TO UKRAINE

COPENHAGEN, 29 MAY

The Swedish government said on Wednesday that it will donate military aid to Ukraine worth USD 1.23 billion in the largest help package Sweden has so far donated.

"It consists of equipment that is at the top of Ukraine's priority list," Deputy Prime Minister Ebba Busch said. It included air defense, artillery ammunition and armoured vehicles.

Sweden's Defense Minister Pål Jonsson reiterated that the country has ruled out for now sending any Swedish-built JAS 39 Gripen jets to Ukraine. *—AP*

Bushra Bibi's ex-husband assaulted by Imran's lawyers outside court

ISLAMABAD, 29 MAY

PHOTO: GEO News

The ex-husband of Imran Khan's third wife Bushra Bibi was attacked by one of the lawyers of the former Pakistan prime minister outside a court here as he appeared for a hearing on appeals against the couple's conviction in the un-Islamic marriage case.

Khan, 71, and Bibi, 49, were sentenced to seven years in prison each on February 3 by a trial court for contracting the marriage during iddat, a mandatory period for a woman in Islam to wait before a second marriage after the death of her husband or divorce.

The case was filed by Bushra's ex-husband Khawar Maneka against the couple in November 2023, alleging that they married without Bushra observing the mandatory waiting period of iddat. He asked the court to declare the marriage null and void.

The court, on 23 May, reserved the verdict on the appeals which was to be announced on Wednesday. During the hearing of appeals filed by Bushra and her husband and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Khan against conviction in the case, Islamabad District and Sessions Judge Shahrukh Arjumand went into his chamber without announcing the verdict.

The couple had married in 2018, the year Khan went on to win elections and become prime minister. Bushra was ostensibly his spiritual guide but the two developed affection for each other during their meetings. She got a divorce from her husband of 28 years with whom she had five children. She is the third wife of Khan, a former cricketing hero, who during his heydays of sporting career had a playboy reputation. *—PTI*

Rupee falls 21 paise to close at 83.39 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 29 MAY

The rupee settled 21 paise lower at 83.39 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, tracking a negative trend in domestic equities and elevated crude oil prices. Forex traders said dollar demand from importers and oil marketing companies (OMCs) also weighed on the rupee. However, foreign inflows in the bond markets ahead of inclusion on India's government bonds in global bond index cushioned the downside. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.22 and finally settled for the day at 83.39 (provisional), down 21 paise from its previous close. On Tuesday, the rupee pared initial gains to settle 5 paise lower at 83.18 against the US dollar. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers in the capital markets on Tuesday, as they purchased shares worth Rs 65.57 crore, according to exchange data. *—PTI*

Silver continues to glitter, hits lifetime high

NEW DELHI, 29 MAY

Silver prices hit a lifetime high levels of Rs 97,100 in the local market on Wednesday, while gold prices rose Rs 250 in line with strong trends in the overseas markets, according to HDFC Securities. Continuing its winning run for the third straight session, silver soared Rs 1,150 to Rs 97,100 per kg. It had closed at Rs 95,950 per kg on Tuesday. In the futures trade, silver also hit a lifetime peak of Rs 96,493 per kg on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX) on Wednesday. Meanwhile, the gold prices climbed Rs 250 to Rs 73,200 per 10 grams in the national capital. In the previous session, the precious metal prices had settled at Rs 72,950 per 10 grams. In international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,352 per ounce, up USD 6 from the previous close. Additionally, silver also traded higher at USD 32.05 per ounce. In the previous session, it ended at USD 31.50 per ounce. *—PTI*

IRCTC's net profit climbs 2 pc to R284 crore

NEW DELHI, 29 MAY

Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation Ltd (IRCTC) declared a net profit of Rs 284 crore for the fourth quarter of 2024. The revenue from the operations of the company rose to Rs 1155 crore, an increase of 17 per cent in the March quarter compared to Rs 965 crore in the same period of last year. The board of directors has recommended the final dividend of 4 per share on the face value of 2 per share for the financial year 2023-24, subject to the approval of the shareholders in the Annual General Meeting (AGM). The filing showed that the overall contribution of internet ticketing has declined to 31 per cent from 32 per cent last year and 37 per cent in financial year 2023. The catering business grew 34.1 per cent to Rs 530.8 crore. , IRCTC's market capitalisation stands at Rs 87,152 crore. *—ANI*

Stock markets fall for 4th day on profit taking

BSE Sensex declines 667.55 points to settle at 74,502.90

The NSE Nifty drops 183.45 points to 22,704.70 ***PHOTO: PTI***

MUMBAI, 29 MAY

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty declined nearly 1 per cent on Wednesday, falling for the fourth day running amid profit-taking by cautious investors ahead of the results of the Lok Sabha polls.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 667.55 points or 0.89 per cent to settle at 74,502.90. It went below the 75,000 mark to hit the day's low of 74,454.55, plunging 715.9 points or 0.95 per cent. The BSE benchmark hit its all-time peak of 76,009.68 on 27 May.

The NSE Nifty dropped 183.45 points or 0.80 per cent to 22,704.70. The 50-share barometer hit its lifetime high of 23,110.80 on Monday.

From the Sensex pack, Tech Mahindra, ICICI Bank, Bajaj Finserv, HDFC Bank, UltraTech Cement, Axis Bank, Reliance Industries and Infosys were the biggest laggards.

Power Grid, Sun Pharma, Nestle, ITC and Bharti Airtel were the gainers.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.88 per cent to USD 84.94 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 65.57 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

After gyrating between gains and losses during the day on Tuesday, the BSE benchmark finally ended 220.05 points or 0.29 per cent lower at 75,170.45. The NSE Nifty dropped 44.30 points or 0.19 per cent to settle at 22,888.15. *—PTI*

BSE: BEWARE OF FRADULENT TRADING APPS

MUMBAI, 29 MAY

The BSE Investor Protection Fund has cautioned investors to beware of fraudulent trading apps that promise unrealistic returns through block deals and IPO allotments.

According to the fund, SEBI (Securities and Exchange Board of India) has been receiving numerous complaints from investors and intermediaries about deceptive trading activities falsely claiming to be associated with prominent SEBI-registered financial institutions.

It added that these impersonators typically operate via social media platforms and messaging apps, such as Facebook pages and WhatsApp groups. They lure investors with promises of guaranteed high returns. Believing they are dealing with legitimate registered intermediaries, investors download these apps and invest through them.

However, their investments are not actually made on the Stock Exchanges but are instead confined to paper trades within the app. *—ANI*

'FALSE CLAIMS'

Paytm recently reported loss in fourth quarter of Rs 550 cr ***PHOTO: PTI***

Paytm, Adani Group deny stake sale talks

NEW DELHI, 29 MAY

Paytm operator One97 Communications Ltd on Wednesday said it is not in talks to sell a stake to the Adani Group. Adani group has also termed such reports as "false and untrue."

Commenting on a report that billionaire Gautam Adani was in talks with Paytm CEO Vijay Shekhar Sharma for a possible stake buy, One97 Communications said, the "news item is speculative and the company is not engaged in any discussions in this regard." Separately, an Adani group spokesperson said, "we categorically deny this baseless speculation. It is totally false and untrue."

Sharma owns 9.1 per cent of Paytm in his personal capacity and another 10.3 per cent through Resilient Asset Management, a foreign entity, as of end-March.

Since shutting its banking unit after falling foul to regulations, Paytm has lost about half of its market value and there have been consistent speculation about it being a potential takeover target.

In February, it was reported to be in talks with billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Jio Financial Services but both entities had denied the same.

Paytm recently reported widening of loss in the fourth quarter of the financial year 2023-24 to Rs 550 crore, following the ban imposed by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on transactions related to its payments bank.

The company during the reported quarter wrote off Rs 227 crore investment for a 39 per cent stake in PPBL, following future uncertainties associated with the bank's business operations including the uncertainty of any other regulatory development etc. *—PTI*

PAYTM SHARES JUMP 5 PC; HIT UPPER CIRCUIT LIMIT

NEW DELHI, 29 MAY

Shares of One97 Communications, which owns Paytm brand, on Wednesday morning jumped 5 per cent to hit its upper circuit limit, amid media reports that the Adani Group may acquire a stake in the fintech firm.

The reports have been denied by both the fintech firm and the Adani Group.

The stock climbed 4.99 per cent to Rs 359.55 -- its upper circuit limit -- on the BSE.

At the NSE, it rallied 4.99 per cent to Rs 359.45 -- the highest trading permissible limit for the day.

According to media reports, Adani Group chairman Gautam Adani is looking to buy a stake in One97 Communications, which operates Paytm.

In a clarification to the BSE on news that Adani in talks with Vijay Shekhar Sharma to acquire stake in Paytm, the company on Wednesday said, "with reference to the captioned subject, we hereby clarify that the above mentioned news item is speculative and the company is not engaged in any discussions in this regard.

"We have always made and will continue to make disclosures in compliance with our obligations under the Sebi (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015," the filing said.

An Adani Group spokesperson said, "We categorically deny this baseless speculation. It is totally false and untrue". *—PTI*

Avaada Energy gets ₹ 315 cr for solar project in K'taka

NEW DELHI, 29 MAY

PHOTO: PTI

Avaada Group's arm Avaada Energy on Wednesday said it has secured Rs 315 crore financing from Aseem Infrastructure Finance for a captive solar project in Karnataka.

Aseem Infrastructure Finance Ltd (AIFL) is an IFC (Infrastructure Finance Company) established with the aim of playing a transformative role in the growth of Indian infrastructure debt financing, according to a company statement.

Avaada Energy, a leading player in the renewable energy sector, has secured financing for its solar PV power project, which is being developed under a long-term captive Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) with the Karnataka Cooperative Milk Producers' Federation Ltd (KMF), the statement said.

The project is located in the Kalaburagi district of Karnataka. KMF, the apex body for the dairy cooperative movement in Karnataka, is rated A+ (Stable) by ICRA.

This financing from AIFL, sanctioned as a 21-year project loan facility obtained on very competitive terms, demonstrates Avaada's derisked project development strategy and strong project financing capability.

Vineet Mittal, Chairman of Avaada Group, said, "This successful financial closure of Rs 315 crore demonstrates our long-standing relationship with Aseem Infrastructure Finance."

The funding will facilitate the development of this marquee captive project for a cooperative entity, illustrating the pervasive impact of energy transition across the Indian economy, the company said. *—PTI*

TO BOOST BUSINESS

Deloitte opens 12,500 sq ft 'phygital' centre in Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 29 MAY

Centre offers solutions to reduce cost & increase efficiency ***PHOTO: PTI***

The largest professional services network, Deloitte, has opened a first-of-its-kind 'phygital' innovation centre in Bengaluru.

This phygital (physical+digital) Innovation centre offers domain-specific solutions to help businesses reduce costs and increase efficiency.

Centre of Innovation and Technology (DCIT) aims to help customers find new and sustainable ways to grow their businesses, and induce a "culture of innovation", said Ashvin Vellody, Partner and Strategy, Innovation, and Assets Leader, Deloitte India.

DCIT is a tech-led project that will assist businesses across sectors to visualise the "art of the possible" and execute business models through a phygital experience, Vellody told PTI.

The centre spans across 12,500 square feet and consists of five zones: retail, manufacturing, digital studio, immersive, and advanced connectivity.

"Our centre aims to assist businesses across industries in reimagining their customer interfaces and experiences, supply chains, and product development by creating diverse prototypes.

He stressed the importance of "co-creation", stating that Deloitte aims to bring the entire ecosystem together for this endeavour.

"We don't want to do this alone, it is a co-creation journey. Not just clients, but all our ecosystem and alliance partners will be part of this journey," he said, adding that DCIT has more than 60 use cases across sectors. *—PTI*

IndiGo to let women pick seats

NEW DELHI, 29 MAY

Women booking tickets in an IndiGo flight can now know about the seats that have already been booked by other female passengers at the time of web check-in, with the airline introducing the new feature after a market research.

IndiGo is the country's largest domestic airline with a market share of over 60 per cent and carried 80 lakh passengers in April, as per an official data. In a release on Wednesday, the airline said it has introduced a new feature that aims to make the travel experience more comfortable for female passengers.

"This has been introduced basis market research, and is currently in pilot mode aligning with our #GirlPower ethos. *—PTI*

HDFC to stop SMS alerts for UPI transactions up to ₹100

NEW DELHI, 29 MAY

PHOTO: PTI

- Starting 25 June, HDFC Bank will stop sending SMS alerts for UPI transactions up to Rs 100

Starting 25 June, HDFC Bank will stop sending SMS alerts for UPI transactions up to Rs 100.

Now SMS notifications will be pushed only for transactions above Rs 100 (for money sent/paid) and above Rs 500 (for money received).

The lender informed its customers through emails that they would continue to receive email alerts for all UPI transactions.

Customers are asked to ensure that their mail is up-to-date to receive all notifications.

The lender however did not reveal the reason behind not sending SMSes for transactions below Rs 100.

Payments through digital means in India are hitting fresh highs, as its citizens are increasingly adopting the emerging modes of transacting on the internet.

The UPI payment system has become hugely popular for retail digital payments in India, and its adoption is increasing at a rapid pace.

UPI is India's mobile-based fast payment system, which facilitates customers to make round-the-clock payments instantly, using a Virtual Payment Address (VPA) created by the customer. The UPI payment system has become hugely popular for retail digital payments in India, and its adoption is increasing at a rapid pace.

Among others, a key emphasis of the Indian government has been on ensuring that the benefits of UPI are not limited to India only; other countries, too, benefit from it.

So far, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, France, UAE, and Singapore, among others, have partnered or intend to partner with India on emerging fintech and payment solutions. *—PTI*

20 nations to attend Energy Storage Week

NEW DELHI, 29 MAY

Government top brass and corporate honchos from over 20 countries will participate in the 10th edition of the India Energy Storage Week (IESW) in New Delhi from 1-5 July, 2024.

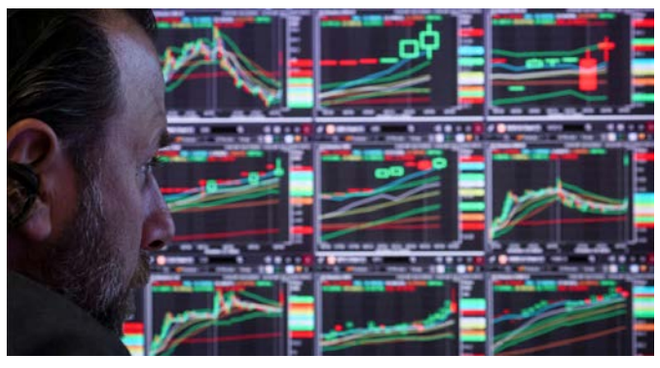
Government and company representatives from Energy Storage, EV and Clean Tech power house nations including the US, UK, Canada, Australia, France, Norway, Germany, Denmark, Finland, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, China and Israel will attend the event, India Energy Storage Alliance (IESA), which organises IESW. With this, IESW endeavours to support India's net-zero goal and push the country's growing global influence on Energy Storage, EV, Clean Tech and Green Hydrogen markets, it said.

Furthermore, the US Department of Energy in collaboration with IESA will host a dedicated seminar. *—PTI*

POSITIVE OUTLOOK

Investors wait-&-watch ahead of results

NEW DELHI, 29 MAY



The market will also actively track exit poll predictions ***PHOTO: PTI***

On Wednesday morning, Indian stock indices consolidated from where they were at the previous session closing. After a stellar rally over the past few weeks, markets faced some resistance this week.

At 9.31am, at the time of filing of this report, Sensex was at 74,906.69 points, down 263.77 points, or 0.35 per cent, and Nifty at 22,800.50 points, down 87.65 points or 0.38 per cent.

Investors are now in a wait-and-watch mode ahead of the Lok Sabha outcome.

It is now expected that further upmoves will depend on the cues from the exit poll estimates, various macroeconomic data that are scheduled later during the week, Q4 India GDP, and US inflation data.

India's GDP grew at a massive 8.4 per cent during the October-December quarter of the financial year 2023-24, and the country continued to remain the fastest-growing major economy. India's economy grew 7.2 per cent in 2022-23 and 8.7 per cent in 2021-22, respectively.

Lately, barring this week, Indian stock indices continued their rally, reaching fresh lifetime highs, tracking strong global market cues, hopes of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's comfortable return to office, besides other strong macroeconomic fundamentals.

In the past two weeks, Sensex jumped over 3,600 points, on a cumulative basis.

- India's GDP grew at a massive 8.4 per cent during the October-December quarter of the financial year 2023-24 and remained to the be fastest- growing major economy

Overseas investors have been remaining net sellers of Indian equities for the past several sessions. Interestingly, domestic institutional investors during the same period stayed net buyers, largely making up for the outflows by the foreign investors.

Going ahead, the market will also actively track exit poll predictions. *—ANI*

LANDMARK EXPERIMENT

Gen Z delegates voting to AI

BANGALORE, 29 MAY

PHOTO: PTI

In an unprecedented move, a group of Indian youth has made history by entrusting their vote decision-making to artificial intelligence (AI) as part of a ground-breaking experiment led by the emerging tech think tank Policy 4.0. This bold initiative marks India's first venture into the concept of augmented democracy, a realm that has seen significant exploration in Europe through Voting Advice Applications (VAAs).

While most conversations about AI and elections focus on deepfakes and misinformation, this study flips the script. "The current landscape on AI and politics is disempowering for voters, where political players leverage AI heavily but voters do not.

Titled "An AI Experiment for Augmented Democracy in India," the study worked with real Indian GenZ voters and tested the ability of existing large language models (LLMs) to make complex, tailored voting decisions on Indian politics. The study ran three separate AI experiments and created two separate AI twins of each voter studied.

These findings are particularly relevant for India's young voters, a demographic that is increasingly influential in the country's electoral outcomes.

With over 15 million first-time voters and approximately 200 million voters aged 20-29 years participating in the 2024 elections, the potential impact of AI on this group could be immense.

The study focused heavily on profiling voters under the age of 29 and suggests that by incorporating voting assistants, similar to those successfully implemented in Europe, India could empower its youth with the tools needed for informed and rational voting. *—PTI*

- While most conversations about AI and elections focus on deepfakes and misinformation, this study flips the script. "The current landscape on AI and politics is disempowering for voters, where political players leverage AI heavily but voters do not

PHOTO: @CHETRI_SUNIL11

Indebted to the sport, my team: Sunil Chhetri

KOLKATA, 29 MAY

Approaching his international retirement, Indian football talisman Sunil Chhetri on Wednesday said he remains indebted to his teammates, and the sport, for helping him become one of the country's greatest players. The Indian team arrived in the city for the 2026 FIFA World Cup Qualifier against Kuwait on June 6, which will be the 39-year-old Chhetri's final outing in the blue jersey. All eyes were on the goal machine as the players exited the airport. "These last few days, I've been caught in a bit of a dilemma. Now that there's a number to my days with the national team, what's the right route to take - do I count every day, every training session? Or do I simply turn up without the thought of how this is coming to an end?," said Chhetri.*—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Still plenty of fear for Real Madrid coach Ancelotti

MADRID, 29 MAY

Carlo Ancelotti is going into his eighth Champions League final, having won all but one of them. He is the most successful coach in the competition thanks to four titles. He also lifted two European trophies as a player. There is no lack of experience for the veteran Italian manager. But there is still plenty of anxiety and fear for Ancelotti ahead of yet another big game.*—AP*

PHOTO: PTI

It's just a shame: ABD laments racial quota

DUBAI, 29 MAY

A B de Villiers is unsurprised that just days before South Africa renews its quest for an elusive World Cup, the talkback home is all about racial quota in the team. It's a rinse-and-repeat situation, and de Villiers, who retired in 2018, is glad he is a mere spectator to the problem now. "...it's a shame going into a tournament to have the focus on that. I mean it's nothing new, it's just a shame," lamented one of the greats of South African cricket. "Luckily this time around, I've had nothing to do with anything over there. *—AP*

PHOTO: X / @NOTBILLWALTON

Ankushita, Nishant seal quarterfinal spots

BANGKOK, 29 MAY

Former world youth champion Ankushita Boro (60kg) and Nishant Dev (71kg) registered comfortable victories to reach the quarterfinals of the second Boxing World Olympic Qualifiers here on Wednesday.National champion Arundhati Choudhary (66kg) also registered a convincing win to advance to the pre-quarterfinals.Boro was up against Asian champion Rimma Volossenko of Kazakhstan. But the Indian wasn't bothered by the stature of her opponent as she went for her punches from Round 1 and never really looked in trouble throughout the bout to earn a 4-1 verdict.*—AP*

Tsitsipas battles past Altmaier to reach 3rd round

Djokovic clinches straight-set win over Frenchman Pierre

PARIS, 28 MAY

Former runner-up Stefanos Tsitsipas survived a mid-match wobble before carving out a 6-3, 6-2, 6-7(2) and 6-4 win over Germany's Daniel Altmaier on Wednesday to book his spot in the French Open third round.

The Greek ninth-seed, winner at Monte Carlo last month, looked to be cruising to an easy win on his favourite clay as he raced through the first two sets in less than an hour.

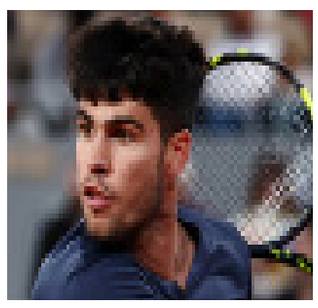
Tsitsipas, a French Open finalist in 2021, pummelled his 83rd-ranked opponent with his powerful forehand before Altmaier upped his game and became more aggressive.

The German, who needed five sets to get through the first round, refused to buckle in the third set, dominating the tiebreak to cut the deficit.

His first break on Tsitsipas' serve put him 4-3 up in the fourth with Altmaier pumping his fists before the Greek recovered quickly, breaking straight back and seeing out the match a little later on his opponent's serve.

Novak Djokovic began his French Open title defence with a solid if not spectacular victory over home hope Pierre-Hugues Herbert.

Serbia's Djokovic, 37, upped his level when it mattered to win 6-4 7-6 (7-3) 6-4 in Tuesday's night session at Roland Garros.



Stefanos Tsitsipas, Carlos Alcaraz and Ons Jabeur PHOTO: X/@WTA)

The 24-time Grand Slam champion will take sole ownership of the record of most major titles with a fourth victory on the Paris clay.

But he has come into the event in uncertain form. Djokovic has endured a turbulent season, having been far from his lofty heights and not yet reaching a final. Playing in Geneva last week was a sign he wanted to build rhythm and confidence before heading to the French Open, saying when he arrived that he had "low expectations but high hopes". Therefore, it was intriguing to see how Djokovic would perform against 142nd-ranked wildcard Herbert. Djokovic's movement at the baseline did not always look comfortable and lacked some sharpness in his return.

However, he generally served well and was still able to pick his moments to strike - most notably in a commanding tie-break.

Jabeur needs three sets to reach third round

Tunisia's Ons Jabeur, the No. 8 seed, advanced to the third round of Roland-Garros by winning against Colombian Camila Osorio 6-3, 1-6, 6-3 in Paris on Wednesday.

Jabeur, ranked No 9, will play the winner of the match between Canadian Leylah Fernandez, the No 31 seed, and Chinese Xiyu Wang next. The Tunisian defeated American wildcard Sachia Vickery (6-3, 6-2) ahead of her victory.

In the previous round, Osorio, ranked No. 77, benefited from the abandonment of Ukrainian Anhelina Kalinina (3-6, 7-6 (2), 4-1).

Alcaraz fights off De Jong to reach third round

Spain's Carlos Alcaraz reached the French Open third round but suffered a worrying loss of form midway through his match against Dutch qualifier Jesper de Jong before winning 6-3 6-4 2-6 6-2 on Wednesday.

The third seed was forced to work hard for a two-set lead under the Court Philippe Chatrier roof, but 176th-ranked De Jong refused to be intimidated and extended the match as Alcaraz suffered a third-set slump.

An error-strewn Alcaraz continued to struggle as the first four games of the fourth set all went against serve, with the 21-year-old becoming increasingly frustrated on the court. *—AP*

NORWAY CHESS

Praggnanandhaa loses to World Champion Liren

STAVANGER, 29 MAY

Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa lost to World Champion Ding Liren in the Armageddon tie-breaker after the two played out a draw under normal time control in the second round of the Norway Chess tournament here.

The second round of the prestigious event saw all three classical games ending up in a draw once again.

Magnus Carlsen, Alireza Firouzja and Liren won with white in the subsequent Armageddon games to grab 1.5 points each.

India's prodigy Praggnanandhaa, who went with a 2-0 head-to-head lead against Liren, played out his first classical draw in the main event.

But the Chinese GM then emerged victorious in the Armageddon tie-breaker

In the highly anticipated pairing of the day, Carlsen and Hikaru Nakamura played out a closely contested classical game that ended in a draw.

Carlsen, demonstrating his exceptional skill under pressure, managed to secure a crucial victory, adding to his impressive Armageddon record and taking the lead of 3 points in tournament standings.

R Praggnanandhaa PHOTO: PTI

India bids to host Gukesh-Liren

NEW DELHI, 29 MAY

India has submitted its bid to host the much-anticipated World Chess Championship clash between teen sensation D Gukesh and defending champion Ding Liren of China in November-December this year. The 17-year-old Gukesh became the youngest-ever challenger for the world title by winning the Candidates Tournament last month. He will face Liren between 20 November to 15 December in Chennai if the country gets the hosting rights.

Meanwhile, Firouzja and Fabiano Caruana also drew their classical game after a complex struggle. *—PTI*

Indian cricket team players during a training session for the T20 World Cup in New York PHOTO: SCREENGRAB VIA @BCCI

India train in 'Big Apple'

NEW YORK, 29 MAY

After two months of intense competitive cricket under night lights, the Indian cricket team, sans Virat Kohli, began its preparations for the T20 World Cup with a morning training session here, keeping in mind the 10.30 am start for all its preliminary games.

Kohli took a break for personal work after RCB's IPL ouster and in all likelihood, he will join the squad by Friday. But it is not clear if he will be able to take part in the only warm-up game against Bangladesh on Saturday after a long flight.

Having played 90 percent of the matches under lights in the scorching Indian summer, the idea would be to adjust to pleasant mornings where temperatures will hover between 25 to 27 degrees Celsius with very little humidity.

A white kookaburra in slightly windy mornings could be a challenge and to be prepared for that, the severely jet-lagged bodies need to get used to morning conditions. This is why the support staff, before initiating the skills training (net sessions) on the practice pitches at a ground on the outskirts of the city, have decided to help the players acclimatize to the conditions.

With 14 players checking in, there was light jogging, routine shuttle runs, and a bit of foot volley to get into the groove."They have been away two and half months from us and getting to know where they stand and what needs to be done before the World Cup is the goal. The (first) goal is to spend 45 minutes in the heat to get going," Strength and Conditioning coach Soham Desai told Bcci. tv."

We came in the day before yesterday and we just eased into our routines here, the players are just getting used to the time zone. Today we are having our first ground session," he added.As far as the players are concerned, there is an element of curiosity about playing cricket in New York. The Indian teams, over the years, have played primarily in Florida at the Fort Lauderhill ground during their tours of the West Indies."First time we are going to play cricket in New York, it's going be fun," all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja said."We have not yet played cricket, came here for a team activity today. *—PTI*

Only Bumrah is executing yorkers: Lee

NEW DELHI, 29 MAY

Legendary Australia speedster Brett Lee feels apart from Jasprit Bumrah, pacers are failing to nail yorkers effectively in the death overs and he wants them to master the pivotal delivery.Bumrah is one of the most complete bowlers in world cricket at the moment. He can bowl wicket-taking deliveries without leaking runs but the most lethal weapon in his armory is his toe-crushing yorker, which he, more often than not.

Sindhu enters second round, Lakshya loses

SINGAPORE, 29 MAY

Former champion P V Sindhu progressed to the women's singles second round but Lakshya Sen went down fighting to world number one Viktor Axelsen at the Singapore Open Super 750 badminton tournament here on Wednesday.

Sindhu had last won a BWF title at Singapore two years back and she entered the tournament after signing off with a runner-up finish at Thailand Open last week.

Up against world no. 21 Line Hojmark Kjaersfeldt of Denmark, the Indian registered a 21-12 22-20 win in a 44-minute opening round to set up a mouth-watering battle against Rio Olympic champion Carolina Marin of Spain.

World No. 3 Marin has an overwhelming 11-5 record against the Indians. The last time the two clashed, it turned out to be an ill-tempered match at Denmark Open which saw both players receiving yellow cards for verbal exchanges. World no. 14 Lakshya, who will be making

P V Sindhu PHOTO: PTI

his Olympic debut at the Paris Games, fought hard but lost steam after the change of ends in the decider to go down 13-21 21-16 13-21 in 62 minutes against Axelsen, who won his first title of the season at Thailand Open last week.

Kidambi Srikanth's opening round match ended in agony as he retired after lagging 14-21 3-11 against Japan's fifth seed Kodai Naraoka.

In other results, B Sumeeth Reddy and N Sikki Reddy lost 18-21 19-21 to Malaysia's Goh Soon Huat and Lai Shevon Jemie in mixed doubles, while Venkat Gaurav Prasad and Juhi Dewangan lost 8-21 8-21 against Mads Vestergaard and Christine Busch in another match. *—PTI*

India hold top spot in ICC rankings heading into T20 WC

DUBAI, 29 MAY

Inaugural T20 World Cup winners India held the top spot in the men's T20I team rankings ahead of the upcoming edition of the tournament, which the West Indies and USA are co-hosting from 1-29 June.

India has 264 rating points. Two-time champions West Indies have moved up to fourth position, their players showing some great form ahead of the T20 showpiece.

The winners of the 2012 and 2016 editions of the tournament are ahead of New Zealand and South Africa after their 3-0 win over South Africa, who were pushed down to seventh position in the list led by India.

2021 champions Australia are second with 257 points, defending champions England third with 254 points and the West Indies two points behind them on 252. New Zealand is on 250 while Pakistan and South Africa are both on 244 points with Pakistan slightly ahead on decimal points.

The West Indies players are to have reaped the benefits of their superb performances in the home series not long before their tournament opener against Papua New Guinea in Guyana on 2 June.

Opening batter Brandon King is up five places to eighth position after topping the series aggregate with 159 runs and Johnson Charles, who hammered 69 off 26 balls to be named Player of the Match in the third T20I, is up 17 places to 20th. Kyle Mayers is another batter to move up, gaining 12 places to reach 31st position with an aggregate of 102 runs while left-arm spinner Gudakesh Motie has advanced a whopping 84 places to 27th. *—AP*

THE KYLIAN MBAPPÉ ERA AT PSG HAS ENDED

PARIS, 29 MAY

The skies dimmed on Saturday evening as PSG's last remaining star exited the stage. Kylian Mbappé's light has only flickered in recent months and Luis Enrique is right to harbour hopes of a brighter future without him.

In Paris, the city of light, there is a perception that the fewer stars there are, the better. In recent history, the club has signed plenty without ever reaching the next level. Ronaldinho and Jay-Jay Okocha arrived in the late 1990s and early 2000s to elevate the club. By the mid-2000s, PSG had regressed. *—AP*

Kylian Mbappé PHOTO: X / @K.MBAPPE

LAST DANCE

Final chance for Kohli, Rohit to give India ICC Trophy

BENGALURU, 29 MAY

It's tough to find two cricketers who are so different from each other yet so closely intertwined by the same thread of fate as Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma.

Rohit's initiation into top-flight cricket came at the idyllic Belfast in 2007 and Kohli's a year later at the more conventional Dambulla. Another intriguing chapter of this journey together will potentially come to an end next month in the stunning Caribbean Isles.

The next T20 World Cup is in 2026, to be jointly hosted by India and Sri Lanka, but Rohit would be touching 40 then and Kohli would be 38. The 50-over version is a further one year away.

It's hard to see them playing in any of those, considering the increasingly strike-rate-oriented nature of the game.

So, both Rohit and Kohli will want to leave the stage with the winner's medal around their neck next month. Should they achieve that, it would be their second each after the 2007 T20 World Cup (Rohit) and the 2011 50-over showpiece (Kohli).

And it will be a perfect send-off for two players who have had an immeasurable impact on India's white-ball fortunes in the last 17 years.

However, the Kohli-Rohit story is not one of bromance.

It's based more on mutual respect and the awareness that they should not step into each other's space.

Kohli has talked about the admiration he has had for Rohit since the very beginning of their careers.

Contrasting in nature, their batting has been high art for the masses to which they added a dash of modernity later.

Of the two, Kohli is the more all-format batter, who has adapted more fluently to the changing face of the game.

Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma

PHOTO: PTI

He has scored in every corner of the cricketing world in a show of consistency that was rarely witnessed after the halcyon days of Sachin Tendulkar.

While Rohit built his edifices in white-ball formats, the Mumbai man remained a reluctant visitor in Test cricket's elite corridors for the better part of his career.

A move up to the opener's role helped Rohit unshackle himself a bit in Tests in the later part of his career.

But for now, Kohli and Rohit will have to lean on their vast experience in T20 cricket to fuel India's run in the World Cup.

Rohit will certainly open and if his approach in last year's World Cup and the just-concluded IPL can be taken as a sign, the skipper will continue his selfless, aggressive approach.

- It's tough to find two cricketers who are so different from each other yet so closely intertwined by the same thread of fate as Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma. Rohit's initiation into top-flight cricket came at the idyllic Belfast in 2007 and Kohli's a year later at the more conventional Dambulla.

Herein, Rohit has an inherent advantage. His natural big-hitting abilities will help him pursue his batsmanship without many improvisations.

That one-legged pull of his is a cosy meeting point between elegance and malevolence.

But Kohli's game is slightly different. He can pull off those occasional big hits – a swat-flick six or a flat-bat smash over the bowler's head. A quick rewind to his pick-up shot off Pakistan pacer Haris Rauf during the 2022 T20 World Cup will vouch for that.

Still, there is a sore point.

Kohli has often struggled to score off-spin, especially against the left-arm variety. His career strike rate against slow bowlers hovers around mid-120s in T20s.

Several times, it has impeded his progress in the middle innings but during this year's IPL, he seemed to have found a solution.

He brought out the slog-sweep against spinners, and it had a healthy influence on his strike rate as Kohli made 260 runs from 188 balls and struck 15 sixes against them.

His strike rate against spin touched 139, a marked improvement from his overall IPL strike rate of 124. *—PTI*